DISRAELI

A PLAY

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DISRAELI

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A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

LOUIS N. PARKER

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TO

GEORGE ARLISS

AND

DENNIS EADIE

IN FRIENDSHIP AND ADMIRATION

NOTE

"DISRAELI" is in no sense an historical play. Time was made for slaves, not for playwrights ; facts were made for biographers to avoid—I have played havoc with both. Lady Beaconsfield was so charming, that I have prolonged her life. The Suez Canal was purchased without any romantic frills, but stocks and shares are dull stuff unless they be gilt-edged.

All I have striven to do is to show a picture of the time in which Disraeli lived, of the kind of people he had to contend with, and, above all, of the man himself, not as a politician, but from the homely and social point of view.

As Sir Francis Drake said on a memorable occasion, "I lay my sword on the table. Now, whosoever raises his hand against me, commits murder upon a weaponless man."

"Disraeli" was written, substantially as it stands now, in 1910. It was first produced at the Princess Theatre, Montreal, on Monday evening, January 23, 1911, with that fine English actor, George Arliss, in the title part, Miss Elsie Leslie as Clarissa, Miss Marguerite St. John as Lady Beaconsfield, and Miss Margaret Dale as Mrs. Travers. The last consecutive performance in America, after long seasons in New York, in Boston, in Chicago, and after travelling from Quebec to Vancouver, from New Orleans to San Francisco, took place in Baltimore on April 27, 1915.

L. N. P.

The play was first produced in England at the Royalty Theatre, London, under the management of Messrs. J. E. Vedrenne and Dennis Eadie, on the afternoon of Tuesday, April 4, 1916, with the following cast :

The Rt. Hon. Benjamin Disraeli	*Dennis Eadie*
The Duke of Glastonbury	*C. Haviland Burke*
Charles, Viscount Deeford	*Cyril Raymond*
Adolphus, Viscount Cudworth	*Ernest Cox*
Lord Brooke of Brookehill	*E. Pardoe Woodman*
Sir Michael Probert, Bart.	*Hubert Harben*
Mr. Hugh Meyers	*Vincent Sternroyd*
Mr. Lumley Foljambe	*Campbell Gullan*
Mr. Tearle (Disraeli's Secretary)	*Howard Sturge*
Bascot (Disraeli's Butler)	*Henry Templeton*
Potter (Disraeli's Gardener)	*Arthur Bowyer*
Flooks (a Rural Postman)	*J. Augustus Keogh*
Perkyns (Butler at Glastonbury Towers)	*Morrice Seaton*
Footman (at Glastonbury Towers)	*Frank Denman*
Lady Beaconsfield	*Mary Jerrold*
The Duchess of Glastonbury	*Frances Ivor*
The Lady Clarissa	*Mary Glynne*
Lady Cudworth	*Gladys Young*
Lady Brooke	*Adela Weekes*
Mrs. Noel Travers	*Gabrielle Dorziat*

Stage Director : Wilfred Eaton.
Musical Director : J. H. Squire.
The play produced by the author.

PERSONS

The Rt. Hon. Benjamin Disraeli
The Duke of Glastonbury
Charles, Viscount Deeford
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Lord Brooke of Brookehill
Sir Michael Probert, Bart.
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Perkyns (Butler at Glastonbury Towers)
Footman (at Glastonbury Towers)
Lady Beaconsfield
The Duchess of Glastonbury
The Lady Clarissa
Lady Cudworth
Lady Brooke
Mrs. Noel Travers

Diplomats, English and foreign naval and military officers ; lords and ladies ; liveried servants, etc., etc.

ACT I

DISRAELI

ACT I

At Glastonbury Towers

The octagonal room at Glastonbury Towers. It is a small room between the breakfast-room on the left, and one of the drawing-rooms on the right. Large folding doors flanked by pillars lead to each. The room is richly furnished. There is a circular ottoman in the middle of the room. At the back two large French windows open into the gardens. Through them one end of a croquet lawn is visible.

[*The large doors right and left are closed when the curtain rises. The babble of conversation in the breakfast-room is heard. The doors R. are thrown open, and a* FOOTMAN, *bearing the "Times" on a salver, enters. He puts it on a table. At that moment the doors left are thrown open by the* BUTLER, *and enter the* DUCHESS, *followed by* LADY CUDWORTH *and* LORD CUDWORTH; *also* LORD BROOKE, *who remains left reading paper.*]

ADOLPHUS [*Coming from the breakfast-room following* LADY CUDWORTH *and the* DUCHESS] And are we going to Balmoral this Autumn, Duchess?

DUCHESS [*Sitting on the ottoman*] The dear Queen has expressed a wish that we should come in October.

[*The* FOOTMAN *bows to the* DUCHESS, *and exit left door*]

LADY CUDWORTH [*R.C.*] Oh, Dolly, I shall want a thousand pounds for gowns.

ADOLPHUS. A thousand pounds? I'm sorry I mentioned it.

DUCHESS. Ermyntrude, your back!

LADY CUDWORTH [*Demurely*] Yes, mamma. [*Stiffens herself.*]

[*Enter* LADY BROOKE *from the drawing-room*]

LADY BROOKE [*Coming behind ottoman and kissing the* DUCHESS] Good morning, mamma. Has everybody finished breakfast?

DUCHESS. *I* have. Your father is still eating or talking.

LADY BROOKE. Here he comes, mamma, with Deeford.

DUCHESS. Talking. It had to be one or the other.

[LORD DEEFORD *and the* DUKE *enter from the breakfast-room*]

DUKE. Yer a Whig, Deeford!

CHARLES. Yes! I shall build model cottages. After all, a happy peasantry is the backbone of England.

DUKE. D'ye know what yer happy peasantry'll do? They'll sell yer drain pipes for old lead; use yer staircase for firewood and keep pigs in yer pantry.

CHARLES. Then I shall turn them out.

DUKE. Ay—and be held up to public execration as a harsh landlord.

[CHARLES *shrugs his shoulders and goes up to the window*]

LADY BROOKE. Mamma, do you think Deeford will speak to Clarissa to-day?

DUCHESS. Hildegarde!—He has not approached me yet!

LADY CUDWORTH. Will she accept him?

DUCHESS. Of *course.*

LADY BROOKE. Oh, I don't know. She's so funny.

DUCHESS. I trust no child of mine was *ever* funny.

LADY CUDWORTH [*Seated*] Does anyone know how Lady Beaconsfield is this morning?

DUCHESS. I sent Mrs. Travers to inquire. She is quite well.

LADY CUDWORTH. Then I shan't have to go up and see her. So glad,—hate climbing stairs.

LADY BROOKE. So horrid of her to faint, just as I was weading aloud.

BROOKE. Oh, I don't know—it did stop you!

DUCHESS. [*Peremptorily*] Brooke!

LADY BROOKE. Mrs. Travers said I reminded her of Sarah Bernhardt.

DUCHESS. Agatha always says the right thing.

ADOLPHUS. Fancy being able to thay the wight thing in theven languages!

DUKE. Charming woman! Charming little—um!

[*Enter* MRS. TRAVERS, *a charming and very smart young woman, from the drawing-room. She has a fan in her hand*]

MRS. TRAVERS [*Gushingly to everybody*] Good morning—good morning!

[*Everybody responds; particularly the* DUKE, *who then sits L. of table and reads*]

DUCHESS. Ah!—I was just talking about you, Mrs. Travers. How is—er—Mr. Disraeli's wife? Quite well, I'm sure.

MRS. TRAVERS. I looked in. Lady Beaconsfield says she is much better this morning.

DUCHESS. Quite well. I said so.

MRS. TRAVERS [*On the Duchess's R.*] Dear Duchess! So sympathetic!—Already at your artistic work!

DUCHESS. It helps me to think.

MRS. TRAVERS [*Admiringly*] Oh!—And what do you think of?

DUCHESS [*Innocently*] Nothing.

MRS. TRAVERS. How calm! How stately!—But indeed, your mind must be fully occupied—

[*The* DUCHESS *looks up*]

with so many guests.

DUCHESS. Why, we have only our two elder girls and their husbands, Charles—Viscount Deeford, you know—and Sir Michael Probert.

MRS. TRAVERS. The Governor of the Bank of England!—You have forgotten Mr. Disraeli and his wife.

[A FOOTMAN *enters from the breakfast-room with two letters on a salver.* LADY CUDWORTH *takes a letter. He brings the other letter to* MRS. TRAVERS, *then exit.*]

DUCHESS [*Acidly*] They are not *my* friends.

DUKE [*Warningly*] Belinda — they are our guests.

DUCHESS. Yes. I cannot help wondering why.

ADOLPHUS [*To* MRS. TRAVERS] Been for a walk this morning?

MRS. TRAVERS. Yes. One mile. Every morning. For my complexion.

ADOLPHUS. How awful!

MRS. TRAVERS. I have not seen Sir Michael Probert yet.

DUCHESS. He only arrived late last night. He had breakfast in his rooms, and now he is busy with his correspondence.

MRS. TRAVERS [*Alluding to her letter, to the* DUCHESS] May I? [DUCHESS *bows assent*]

CHARLES. Duchess, are we not to see Lady Clarissa this morning?

DUCHESS. Has Clarissa not breakfasted?

LADY CUDWORTH. Oh, she had a cup of tea at eight o'clock and went for a walk in the home-park with Mr. Disraeli.

[CHARLES *shows annoyance, which the* DUCHESS *observes*]

CHARLES. And Mrs. Disraeli—I beg pardon!—I should say, Lady Beaconsfield—?

MRS. TRAVERS [*Looking up from her letter and smiling maliciously*] Lady Beaconsfield is not down yet.

[CHARLES *catches* MRS. TRAVER'S *eye and again shows annoyance*]

DUCHESS [*Hastily*] It is not unusual. Clarissa likes these early walks. When we are alone, she goes to the vicarage and back every morning.

CHARLES. Two miles! How strenuous.

DUCHESS. She reads Greek with the Vicar.

[*The* BROOKES *are seen on the lawn playing croquet*]

CHARLES. I am not sure that a young lady should read Greek.

LADY CUDWORTH. Will you play croquet, Deeford?

CHARLES. I am—ah—averse to violent exercise at such a matutinal hour.

MRS. TRAVERS. So like my poor dear husband.

DUCHESS. How *is* your husband, Agatha?

MRS. TRAVERS [*Alluding to the letter she is reading*] Noel?—Oh, just the same. He writes he is moving from Carlsbad to Kissingen.

CHARLES. When do you expect to see him? When will he be in England?

MRS. TRAVERS. Never. He wanders from one watering-place to another.

CHARLES. I trust he derives benefit—

MRS. TRAVERS. None whatever. All the waters disagree with him. He develops new symptoms everywhere, and has to go somewhere else to change them.

DUCHESS. I remember when we first met you at Baden-Baden, or Ems, or—or—

MRS. TRAVERS. Schwalbach, dear Duchess.

DUCHESS. Schwalbatsh—One of those places you go to for gout.

MRS. TRAVERS. You were so kind.

DUCHESS. I was sampling wools. I couldn't speak a word of their objectionable jargon, and you helped me.

MRS. TRAVERS. Dear Duchess! Why *should* you speak a foreign language? You are English.

DUCHESS. Thank heaven. But your husband was not with you then.

MRS. TRAVERS [*Hastily*] He had gone to—Schlangenbad. In a hurry. Oh, dear! I ought

to be with him now; but we are so dreadfully poor! [*Rising*]

CHARLES [*Laughing*] Oh, come! Those exquisite diamonds last night—

DUKE [*Stirring uncomfortably behind the "Times"*] Ha—hum!

MRS. TRAVERS [*Quickly, with a wonderful smile*] Heirlooms. We are poor, but we have ancestors. Ah! You are looking at my frock. You don't know what shifts a poor little woman is driven to. This cost me nothing. *Worth* knows what circles I move in, and considers me his best advertisement. [*With an appealing glance at the* DUCHESS] There! Now you despise me.

DUCHESS. Nonsense, Agatha! There's nothing to be ashamed of in having a good figure.

DUKE. Heah! Heah!

MRS. TRAVERS. Oh, Duchess, you are always so kind. *You* know how poor I am.

DUCHESS. Poor dear thing, yes.

MRS. TRAVERS. But one has one's position to keep up; and one must look nice.

DUKE. You do. You do. Charmin'! Char— [*He catches the* DUCHESS'S *eye and collapses behind his paper*]—hum!

[*Enter the* BUTLER *L. with telegrams on a salver. He looks about him, evidently in search of someone*]

DUCHESS. For me?

BUTLER. Telegrams for Mr. Disraeli, your Grace.

DUCHESS [*Acidly*] He is not here.

BUTLER [*Helplessly*] No, your Grace. [*He stands irresolute*]

MRS. TRAVERS [*Eagerly; on the point of taking the telegrams*] I think I could find him!

DUCHESS [*Sharply*] Certainly not, Agatha! [*To the* BUTLER] Keep them.

[*Exit* BUTLER]

DUCHESS. Despatches, messages, telegrams! One has no peace with that man in the house!

DUKE. Come, come, Belinda!

(LADY BROOKE *has been seen with* BROOKE *on the lawn outside. She ix reading to him. They enter through window. He is bored to death*]

LADY BROOKE.

I know not what I was playing
Or what I was dweaming then,
But I stwuck one chord of music
Like the sound of a gweat Amen.

MRS. TRAVERS. The divine Sarah to the life!

[*The* DUKE *rises irritably*]

BROOKE. Oh, I say! That's stunning!

[*He disengages his arm, and drifts out again*]

DUCHESS [*Severely*] Hildegarde, I hope that is not Swinburne!

[MRS. TRAVERS *rises to hide her laughter and joins the* DUKE]

LADY BROOKE. Oh, no, mamma! It's dear Adelaide Anne Procter.

DUCHESS [*To* CHARLES] I do not allow my daughters to read Swinburne.

LADY CUDWORTH *and* LADY BROOKE [*Together: demurely*] No, mamma.

DUKE [*To* MRS. TRAVERS] Belinda's not to be trifled with—what? Purity of the home—eh?

MRS. TRAVERS. Ah—there's no place like home.

DUKE. Thank God!

MRS. TRAVERS. Hush! Naughty!

LADY CUDWORTH [*To the* DUCHESS; *very innocently*] How papa does admire a pretty face.

DUCHESS [*To* CHARLES] Charles, take Mrs. Travers into the rosery. You may meet Clarissa.

CHARLES. I want very much to speak to you. Duchess.

DUCHESS. Well—?

CHARLES. Alone, if it were possible.

DUCHESS. Oh!

[*Looks meaningly at* LADY CUDWORTH *who rises and goes off through the window with* LADY BROOKE]

Well, come back in a few minutes.

CHARLES. Thank you. [*To* MRS. TRAVERS] Will you come? I will tell you about my scheme for model cottages.

MRS. TRAVERS. Oh, how absorbing!

[*They go out through the window and are seen on the lawn*]

DUKE [*After a pause*] Belinda, I should be grateful if you would not speak of Mr. Disraeli as you do. I have told you—I invited him for political reasons.

DUCHESS [*Engrossed in her embroidery*] I believe a Mr. Joseph Arch—an estimable agricultural labourer—is agitating in Somersetshire. Do you propose to invite *him*—for political reasons?

DUKE. 'Tsha! You are vexatious! As if there could be any comparison!

DUCHESS. I grant it would be all in Mr. Arch's favour. Arch is a good Saxon name. I should not be surprised if he could trace his ancestry much farther back than yours. Moreover, he is a Christian.

DUKE [*Turning to her quickly*] So is—

DUCHESS [*Deliberately*] Benjamin Disraeli? It does not sound probable.

DUKE [*Flustered*] He is the brains of the party.

DUCHESS. Brains do not give birth.

DUKE. He has achieved a high position.

DUCHESS. By wearing satin waistcoats and marrying an old woman for her money!

DUKE [*Coming to her*] Belinda! Yer not going to say anything against Lady Beaconsfield?

DUCHESS. Only one thing.

DUKE. What?

DUCHESS. She married Mr. Disraeli.

DUKE. Belinda!

[*Seeing the* BUTLER *who has again come in with a telegram on a salver*]

I—I have no patience.

[*Exit into garden*]

DUCHESS [*To* BUTLER] Yes?

BUTLER. Mr. Disraeli, your Grace.

DUCHESS. More telegrams?

BUTLER. And there's a newspaper person at the door askin' for 'im.

DUCHESS. I have told you, Mr. Disraeli is not in.

[*Exit* BUTLER]

[*The* DUCHESS *rises impatiently. Enter* CHARLES *from the garden*]

CHARLES. Are you alone?

DUCHESS. Yes. But I am out of temper.

CHARLES [*Laughing*] Oh, Duchess.

DUCHESS. That Mr. Disraeli! He turns our house into a public thoroughfare! And now there's a newspaper person trying to get into the house.

CHARLES. Shall I dismiss the—ah—newspaper person?

DUCHESS. No, no! [*Sits; smiling in anticipation*] Well, now, Charles, what is it?

CHARLES. I think you can guess.

DUCHESS. Perhaps. But assume I cannot.

CHARLES. When I accepted your delightful invitation, I did so with a purpose.

DUCHESS. Yes?

CHARLES. I have been thinking very seriously lately, Duchess; and I have concluded that it is my duty to get married.

DUCHESS. How old are you?

CHARLES. Twenty-one.

DUCHESS. That is very young.

CHARLES. Yes; but I am thinking of my wife more than of myself. We must take time by the forelock. She will have to face heavy responsibilities in the near future.

DUCHESS. Surely your father is in good health?

CHARLES. Excellent; but his habit of life does not encourage the hope of extreme longevity. Briefly, I ask permission to pay my respectful addresses to Lady Clarissa. May I hope you and the Duke will grant it?

DUCHESS. If I grant it, the Duke will. But Clarissa is barely twenty.

CHARLES. I shall have the better chance of moulding her.

DUCHESS. She is very high-spirited; she displays a note of originality. [*More in sorrow than in anger*] She takes no interest in embroidery, for instance. She gave up her music lessons with Arabella Goddard. And what reason do you think she offered? She said she was too musical, and Arabella Goddard was not musical enough!

CHARLES [*Laughing with amused superiority*] These amiable eccentricities do not alarm me. Remember, she will be constantly in my society.

DUCHESS [*Quite simply*] Yes; that ought to sober her.

CHARLES. May I take it, then, that you graciously consent?

DUCHESS. Joyfully, Charles; joyfully! I shall be very happy to hear she has accepted you.

CHARLES. You shall hear that to-day. [*He takes her hand and kisses it formally*] Thank you! Thank you!

[*Enter through the window, the* DUKE *and* LADY BEACONSFIELD, *followed by* MRS. TRAVERS]

DUKE [*Coming in apprehensively*] Here is Lady Beaconsfield, Belinda.

DUCHESS [*Coldly*] Ah—good morning.

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Very genially*] Good morning, Duchess.

DUCHESS. I am glad to hear you are much better.

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Thank you. I am looking for my scapegrace husband.

DUCHESS. I believe he is in the home-park with Clarissa.

LADY BEACONSFIELD. There never was a man with such instinct for youth and beauty.

DUCHESS [*With raised eyebrows*] Indeed?

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Laughing*] I know what you mean by "indeed." You wonder why the instinct failed him when he married me.

DUCHESS. I assure you—!

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Oh, I don't mind in the least. [*With enthusiasm*] The greatest man in the world is my husband, and I don't really care how or why.

DUCHESS [*Drily*] Very right and proper.

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Has Sir Michael Probert been seen this morning? I know Dizzy is anxious to meet him.

[MRS. TRAVERS *listens interestedly.* LORD *and* LADY BROOKE *come in from the garden*]

DUCHESS [*Icily*] The Governor of the Bank of England is naturally much occupied, even in the vacation.

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Simply*] So is the Prime Minister; especially when he seems to be playing.

MRS. TRAVERS. The Governor of the Bank of England! Oh, if he'd give me the run of his cellars for five minutes!

[LORD *and* LADY CUDWORTH *come in*]

DUKE [*Chuckling; to her and tapping her with her fan, with which he had been playing*] I know you could make him—ha-ha-ha! I know you could! You have only to flirt your fan at him! [*Ultimately he lays the fan on the writing desk*]

DUCHESS [*Shocked*] Duke!—Agatha!

MRS. TRAVERS [*Gushingly to the* DUCHESS] Oh, dear Duchess, that was only a joke.

DUCHESS. I do not care for that sort of joke.

CHARLES [*Ponderously*] I fear the run of the cellars would not be of much use to you. The numbers of the notes are known, and—

MRS. TRAVERS [*Demurely*] Yes. You don't like jokes either, do you?

CHARLES [*Posing*] Humour is of several kinds. We Oxford men have a humour of our own.

MRS. TRAVERS. Which you keep to yourselves.

[*Enter* CLARISSA *from the garden, loaded with flowers. She comes in with a rush*]

CLARISSA. Good morning, everybody!

CHARLES. Lady Clarissa!
MRS. TRAVERS. Clarissa! } [*Together*]
DUCHESS. My dear *child!*

CLARISSA [*Tossing the flowers aside, and coming to her mother*] Oh, mother! I'm so excited!

DUCHESS. I wish I could persuade you never to be excited.

CLARISSA. Then you shouldn't have the greatest man in the world to stay here.

[CHARLES *shows annoyance*]

LADY BEACONSFIELD. There! *She* calls him the greatest man in the world, too!

CLARISSA [*Coming to her, and taking both her hands*] Oh, you happy woman! Always to be with him! To be the first to know his thoughts! Oh, you happy woman!

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Kissing her*] That's what I keep on saying, my dear.

CLARISSA. He transforms everything he touches. He even turns the landscape into fairyland. A primrose by a river's brim is not merely a yellow primrose, but the text for beautiful fancies!

CHARLES [*Booming*] It is my deliberate opinion that a statesman should not indulge in fancies.

[CLARISSA *gives him a look which ought to warn him he is treading on dangerous ground; but he is too absorbed in his own wisdom to notice it*]

DUKE [*Absent-mindedly, to* CLARISSA] But come come! What have you done with Dizzy? [*To* LADY BEACONSFIELD] Hum! I *beg* your pardon!

LADY BEACONSFIELD. You needn't. I call him Dizzy because I love him. The world calls him Dizzy because it loves him. That nickname is nobler than a peerage.

DUKE. Ah—! I won't apologise again. Where is he?

CLARISSA. I think he's gone to feed the peacocks.

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Laughing*] Oh! Peacocks and swans: he positively dotes on them. Hughenden is quite over-run with them.

ADOLPHUS. Extraordinary personality, Mr. Disraeli's. Sort of man you feel come into a room, even if you don't see him.

CHARLES [*Crossly*] That's nonsense, Dolly.

BROOKE. Wubbish, Dolly! Nobody takes any notice when *I* come into the woom!

MRS. TRAVERS. I'm yearning to hear him speak.

DUCHESS. Why, Agatha?

MRS. TRAVERS. Everybody tells me he says such wonderful things.

CLARISSA [*Enthusiastically*] So he does. Wonderful and beautiful.

[DISRAELI *enters from the garden, carrying a small bunch of flowers*]

DISRAELI. Duchess, your peacocks are moulting too early. They want more food and less water.

DUCHESS. I do not attend to animals.

DISRAELI. Then I fear you miss a great deal of pathetic affection. [*Then, to his wife*] Good morning, Mary Ann. [*To the others*] Good morning.—Duke.—Ah, Mrs. Travers?

MRS. TRAVERS [*Smiling*] Did you have a pleasant walk with Clarissa?

DISRAELI. Delightful. Winter hand in hand with Spring. Innocence with—

CHARLES [*Sarcastically*] Guile?

DISRAELI. Experience. Same thing.

MRS. TRAVERS. And those charming flowers?

DISRAELI [*To* LADY BEACONSFIELD] Mary, my dear; your morning tribute!

[*He hands her the flowers, and then kisses her, much to the disgust of the others*]

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Thank you, Dizzy! [*To the others. Explaining*] Every morning of his life—wherever we are—

MRS. TRAVERS [*Laughing*] How ungallant to omit us!

DISRAELI. My homage to Lady Beaconsfield is a homage to the entire sex.

[MRS. TRAVERS *curtsies*]

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Protesting laughingly*] No,

no, Dizzy! I won't be put off like that! It's a personal love-token, and you know it.

DISRAELI [*Laughing*] Lay not that flattering unction to your soul! You know I married you for your money.

[*Everybody deeply shocked*]

LADY BEACONSFIELD. All very well; but if 'twas to do over again, now you'd marry me for love.

DISRAELI. Perish the thought! For all who marry for love either beat their wives, or run away from them.

CHARLES [*Indignantly*] I trust you are jesting, sir!

DISRAELI [*Lifting his eyeglass and looking at him a moment*] Sir, I trust I am. But I can never be sure. [*Breaking off*] Still no Probert?

DUCHESS. Sir Michael is extremely busy.

DISRAELI [*Crossing toward bell-push*] Tsh! Lazy man!

CHARLES. Lazy—?

DISRAELI. Why, of course. The man who does things, should never be seen doing 'em.

CHARLES. That is a pose.

DISRAELI. Not at all. It's a pose when he lets himself be seen.

[*To everybody's amazement he rings without asking leave. Then he remembers*]

Oh—Duchess, may I ring?

DUCHESS [*Sharply*] You have. Surely you have breakfasted?

DISRAELI. Ages ago!

[*To the* BUTLER *who enters and comes to* DUCHESS]

Ah—would you very kindly tell Sir Michael Probert I wish to speak to him?

[*He carelessly drops his hat and cloak on the* BUTLER'S *arm*]

[*The* BUTLER *is taken aback and glances at the* DUCHESS. *She nods. The* BUTLER *exit*]

DUKE [*To break the awkward pause; to the young people*] Er—had a pleasant game?

CLARISSA [*To the* DUCHESS, *laughing*] Poor Perkyns nearly fainted.

DISRAELI [*To* CLARISSA] Why?

DUCHESS [*Stiffly*] One does not realise that the Governor of the Bank of England can be—ah—rung for.

DISRAELI [*Simply*] Why not!

DUKE [*Interposing hastily*] My dear Belinda, Mr. Disraeli orders us *all* about. We tremble at his nod.

MRS. TRAVERS. The Prime Minister and the Governor of the Bank! What wonderful things we shall witness!

DISRAELI. I fear not, dear lady! [*Looking at her dreamily*] Strange! Strange!

MRS. TRAVERS [*With mock alarm*] Heaven! Is my hair coming down?

DISRAELI. You remind me of something—something blue and white.

MRS. TRAVERS. How very charming!

DISRAELI [*To the* DUCHESS] I am going to carry my impertinence so far as to ask you to allow me to see Probert in private.

DUCHESS. Will you take him to the library?

DISRAELI. The library is too solemn. It suggests

a—Conference. All I want is a chat. [*Carelessly*] No; this dainty room, with its flowers, its sunshine, will answer my purpose quite well.

[*General horrified amazement*]

DUCHESS [*Rising indignant*] But—!

DUKE [*Hastily*] Of course, of course. We'll clear out. [*Offering* MRS. TRAVERS *his arm*] Mrs. Travers, I'll show you my guns. Belinda, take Lady Beaconsfield to the orangery.

[*Exit with* MRS. TRAVERS. *The* CUDWORTHS *and* BROOKES *go off into the garden*]

DUCHESS [*Moving to go, turns to* CLARISSA] You will entertain Deeford, Clarissa. [*Exit into garden*]

CHARLES [*To* CLARISSA] I shall be enchanted. Lady Clarissa, I should like to tell you about my—ah—reforms on the estate. I am convinced that a happy peasantry—

DISRAELI [*Attentive, coming over to* CHARLES] What reforms, young gentleman?

CHARLES [*Haughtily*] Oh! I fear you would consider them beneath notice. I am reclaiming marshy districts; introducing a new system of drainage; building model dwellings; model dairies; mere questions of sanitation.

DISRAELI [*Looks at* CHARLES *with surprise*] Why, I had no idea! A policy of sewage! That is splendid! That is true statesmanship! Health before everything! *Sanitas sanitatum: omnia sanitas.*

CHARLES [*Bridling*] I knew you would laugh at me. [*To* CLARISSA] Will you come?

CLARISSA [*Coldly*] Very sorry. I'm going to write up my diary. [*She turns to go*]

CHARLES [*Following her*] Your diary— ?

CLARISSA. Yes. [*Indicating* DISRAELI] During our walk he said things I want to remember.

[CHARLES *makes an angry gesture and exit through window right, shutting it after him*]

[*Enter* SIR MICHAEL PROBERT. CLARISSA *curtsies to him*]

CLARISSA. Good morning, Sir Michael! [*Exit*]

PROBERT. Good morning!

[*To* DISRAELI] Mr. Disraeli, I am very busy this morning.

DISRAELI. Then how grateful you must be for this interruption!

PROBERT. Now, Mr. Disraeli—

DISRAELI. One moment. [*He crosses to the drawing-room door, which he closes; then he closes both windows*]

PROBERT [*Watching him in wonderment*] Good heavens! Isn't it warm enough?

DISRAELI. Extraordinary how voices travel.

PROBERT. Eh?

DISRAELI. And how pretty ears come half-way to meet them.

PROBERT. Do you suggest— ?

DISRAELI. Nothing. Sit down, Probert. Sit down!

PROBERT [*Sitting unwillingly*] I am unusually busy!

DISRAELI. I am usually busy. Now, tell me. You arrived last night after we had all gone to bed, but you found a note from me awaiting you.

PROBERT. Ha, ha! That was not meant to be taken in earnest.

DISRAELI. Pardon me, in dead earnest!

PROBERT. Do you seriously mean you are thinking of purchasing the Suez Canal?

DISRAELI. I have seldom meant anything half so seriously.

PROBERT. But it's not for sale.

DISRAELI. It is for sale. Ismail is dying to sell.

PROBERT. How do you know?

DISRAELI. Mr. Greenwood—Mr. Henry Oppenheim—but, after all, how doesn't matter.

PROBERT. And you ask the Bank of England to back you?

DISRAELI. Temporarily. Until Parliament meets.

PROBERT. On this vague knowledge which you will not even explain.

DISRAELI. I will explain when the times comes. All I want now is your assent on principle.

PROBERT. Then let me tell you at once, sir, you shall never have that assent. Never, sir!

[*About to rise*]

DISRAELI [*Stopping him*] Wait a moment!

PROBERT [*Sitting again*] No, sir. There is nothing to wait for. I am a serious man. I shall not allow the Bank to play at ducks and drakes with the money entrusted to its keeping. Ducks and drakes, sir, on an Egyptian ditch.

DISRAELI. Egyptian ditch? That's rather neat. Only it's not ducks and drakes, because the Government will be at your back.

PROBERT. How do I know that?

DISRAELI [*With a flash*] I say so.

PROBERT. Suppose the Government fall?

DISRAELI [*Turning on him*] My dear man, it's

always falling. What difference does that make? Don't the Conservatives invariably go on just where the Radicals left off, and vice versa? Besides, in this case it hasn't time to fall. This thing must be done within the next three weeks; long before Parliament meets—

MRS. TRAVERS *appears outside, close to the window*]

PROBERT. Why in such a hurry?

DISRAELI. Because the high-road to India—

PROBERT [*Interrupting him with a snort*] Oh! that ancient bugbear!

DISRAELI. That ever present peril!—Our rivals know of this opportunity to purchase this high-road.

PROBERT. Then why haven't they purchased it?

DISRAELI. They're not ready; they have no fleet, but—they are watching us. They are watching *me*—

[MRS. TRAVERS *gently pushes the window open and listens*]

PROBERT. Ha! The spy mania!

DISRAELI. And if they see the slightest move on my part, they will snap up the canal, fleet or no fleet!

PROBERT [*Turning to him*] But my dear sir—

[*He sees* MRS. TRAVERS. *She is innocently plucking a flower from a creeper surrounding the window*]

By Jove, what a pretty woman!

[*She holds the flower in her hand, looks in at them, nods pleasantly, and passes on and out of sight*]

DISRAELI [*Turns towards* MRS. TRAVERS *as* PROBERT *speaks. He waits until she begins to move on, then turns to* PROBERT] Yes. [*Watches her going, then turns to* PROBERT *again*] Such pretty ears!

[*Goes up and closes the window, stands there thinking a moment, then dismisses the incident and comes down to* PROBERT, *who has resumed his seat*]

Well, sir, after that delightful interlude—

PROBERT. No, sir, in my opinion your scheme is hare-brained. Moreover it is unconstitutional, and the Bank will be no party to your high-handed methods.

DISRAELI. [*Impatiently*] I tell you there is no time—

PROBERT [*Waving him aside*] You exaggerate the importance of the thing. You have the Eastern imagination. Because this canal runs through a desert, you see it in a dream—in a mirage—

DISRAELI [*Sitting on the causeuse*] Neat again. [*With a whimsical glance at him*] Ah, we poets!

PROBERT. The canal is a confessed failure.

DISRAELI. Oh?

PROBERT. Whatever doesn't pay's a failure. [*Ponderously*] I have it on excellent authority that the tonnage which passed through it last year—

DISRAELI [*Interrupting him impatiently*] English tonnage, remember!—practically all English.

PROBERT. What of it?

DISRAELI. Would you like to see the canal closed to it?

PROBERT. It's closing itself! Ha, ha! It's silting up, sir; silting up! Soon the only ship sailing on it will be the ship of the desert. I mean the camel, sir!

DISRAELI [*Innocently*] I *thought* you meant the camel.

PROBERT. Beware of the East. Don't touch it, or you will go under. Remember Pharaoh, sir! Remember Pharaoh!

DISRAELI. Yes; but what about Moses?

PROBERT. He was a Jew—hum—he was privileged.

DISRAELI. In short—?

PROBERT. In short—[*Rising*] I disapprove of your flamboyant ideas, Mr. Disraeli; they are un-English; and the Bank shall not stir a finger to further them.

[DISRAELI *moves away, mastering his anger, and opens the windows*]

Why are you—?

DISRAELI. I feared you were getting too warm. *I* was.

PROBERT. Ha!—I rejoice to think I have made this rash enterprise impossible.

DISRAELI. Oh, but you haven't.

PROBERT. What! Where will you go for the money?

DISRAELI [*Turning to him and coming down slowly*] I shall go where Pharaoh went. Where all Christians go. I shall go to Moses.

[PROBERT *is nonplussed for the moment, but he recovers and crosses determinedly to the drawing-room door*]

PROBERT. At any rate, understand. It will be no use coming to me. Under no circumstances whatsoever shall the National Institution of which I am the head, be a party to your unconstitutional methods. [*At the door, turning to* DISRAELI] This, sir, is definite and final.

DISRAELI. Nothing is final, Sir Michael. In the unlikely event of Moses failing me, I may send for you again.

PROBERT [*Defiantly*] And I shall not come, sir!

[*Exit*]

[LADY BEACONSFIELD *has entered through the window*]

DISRAELI [*Looking after* PROBERT] I think you will. I think you will.

[*He closes the door and stands thinking a moment*]

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Anxiously*] Have you quarrelled with him?

DISRAELI. No—no, my dear, but he's—he's missed his opportunity.

[*He crosses quickly to the writing-desk, pulls the bell and sits to write a telegram*]

Mary, I want you to come to my room and write some letters for me. I must get hold of Hugh Meyers.

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*With a touch of anxiety*] Hugh Meyers, the banker?

DISRAELI. Hugh Meyers, the banker. That's the man, Mary, that's the man.

[BUTLER *enters*]

Would you very kindly send that telegram?

[*Gives it to the* BUTLER, *who exit*]

[DISRAELI *picks up* MRS. TRAVER'S *fan, looks at it and thinks; puts it down; rises and comes slowly to centre.* LADY BEACONSFIELD *watches him; anxiously calls to him.*]

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Dizzy!

[*He stops and beckons to her to come to him*]

DISRAELI. Mary—where have I seen Mrs. Travers before?

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Relieved*] Oh!—we've met her at dinners—

DISRAELI. No, no! I mean, long ago.

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Now, Dizzy! You're off on one of your wild-goose chases.

DISRAELI. And now she haunts me.

LADY BEACONSFIELD. She worships you—as all pretty women do.

DISRAELI [*Musing*] Blue and white—blue and white—

LADY BEACONSFIELD. What *are* you talking about?

DISRAELI. I connect her with something blue and white.

[MRS. TRAVERS *and* CLARISSA *are seen crossing on the lawn.* MRS. TRAVERS *laughs*]

LADY BEACONSFIELD. *Dizzy!*

DISRAELI. Here she is again!—with Clarissa. Run along, my dear, run along.

[LADY BEACONSFIELD *exit into the drawing-room*]

[*He follows her. Just as he is at the door, he hears* MRS. TRAVERS *laughing again. He looks towards her*]

Where the devil was it? [*Suddenly, with a gleam of triumph*] *I* know!

[*Exit into the drawing-room, closing the door*]

[*Enter* MRS. TRAVERS *and* CLARISSA *from the garden*]

CLARISSA [*Looking after* DISRAELI] There, now! We've driven him away! What a pity!

MRS. TRAVERS. What a hero-worshipper you are!

CLARISSA. But what a hero to worship! When I am talking with him, I am talking with one of the makers of history.

MRS. TRAVERS. I suppose he unburdens himself to you quite freely?

CLARISSA. It never seems as though it were important; but suddenly I find he is telling me great and wonderful things. He thinks in empires.

MRS. TRAVERS. This friendship between the young girl and the statesman is strangely beautiful. How precious your sympathy must be to him.

CLARISSA. I realise what he has done for his country, what difficulties he has overcome by his genius; and everybody else seems so trivial—so unnecessary. Don't you feel that? [*She sits on the ottoman*]

MRS. TRAVERS. I think I understand. What would I give to make a third in your conversations? [*Sits beside her*]

CLARISSA. Why don't you?

MRS. TRAVERS [*Insinuatingly*] Poor little me! I haven't brains enough. No. You must sometimes tell me in a simple way what he has been saying. [*Innocently*] For instance, why did he summon Sir Michael just now?

CLARISSA. Oh! He doesn't talk about little things like that! He discusses the condition of the people, the policy of nations.

MRS. TRAVERS. And his own ambitions?

CLARISSA. Never. His ambition is limited to making his country great.

MRS. TRAVERS. But tell me—why—

[*Enter* CHARLES, *from the garden*]

CHARLES [*Ironically*] So your Mr. Disraeli has kindly allowed you to come back?

CLARISSA [*Rising*] Come, Agatha. Mamma will be wanting me.

CHARLES. The Duchess sent me to ask Mrs. Travers to join her.

CLARISSA [*To* MRS. TRAVERS] Agatha, come!

[MRS. TRAVERS *rises smilingly*]

CHARLES [*To* CLARISSA] As a reward, she held out the hope that you would cheer my loneliness.

MRS. TRAVERS [*To* CLARISSA, *hastily*] Yes, dear; that is only fair.

[*Exit, turning at the window to smile at* CHARLES]

CHARLES [*With a sigh of satisfaction*] Ah—! [*In the grand manner*] Now, Lady Clarissa, pray be seated.

CLARISSA [*Coming over to him; abruptly*] Why do you dislike Mr. Disraeli so much?

CHARLES [*Taken aback*] I neither like him, nor dislike him. He is nothing to me.

CLARISSA. Oh?—Don't you feel lonely?

CHARLES [*Astonished*] Lonely—?

CLARISSA. You are the only man in all the world who neither likes nor dislikes Mr. Disraeli.

CHARLES [*Dismissing the subject. Patronisingly*] Yes, yes. I know how you admire him. But we won't argue about that now.

[*Short pause ; then, with great formality*]

I have had the honour of a conversation with your mother.

CLARISSA [*With a quick look at him*] Yes ?

CHARLES. And she has given me her gracious permission to address you.

CLARISSA [*Demurely*] Was her permission needed ?

CHARLES. For my present purpose, yes. I am rather a stickler for form, you know.

CLARISSA [*Simply, but again with a look*] I know.

CHARLES. The fact is, as I told your mother, I consider it my duty to marry—

CLARISSA. Yes— ?

CHARLES. It is perhaps, as she pointed out, a little early. But I have views, and I wish to have time to inculcate them in my wife before she has to assume her full responsibilities and—ah—privileges—as Duchess of Dunelm.

CLARISSA [*Sitting abruptly on the ottoman*] Yes ?

CHARLES. I am much interested in the working-man. I have plans for building model cottages, with improved—ah—sanitary appliances. I shall spend a good deal of time among my people. I shall expect my wife to help me. We must raise the tone of the agricultural labourer. You will hardly believe that many of them have never heard of Ruskin. All that must be altered. I trust the Duke and Duchess of Dunelm will show their humble friends a model English household ; model schools ; model children—in short, a model—

CLARISSA. One moment. What have all these models to do with me?

CHARLES [*Somewhat surprised*] Have I not made myself clear? Since I first had the privilege of meeting you, I have watched you closely, and,—ah—Clarissa—may I call you Clarissa?

[*She bows assent; he sits beside her*]

I have decided that in time, you will become admirably suited to occupy the position I have—er—[*with great enjoyment of the word*] adumbrated.

CLARISSA [*Quickly*] I beg your pardon?

CHARLES [*Explaining graciously*] Adumbrated—outlined, or, more correctly, foreshadowed.

CLARISSA [*Demurely*] Thank you. You will think me very silly, Charles—may I call you Charles?

[*He gravely bows assent*]

Thank you. But I am not quite sure I understand you, even yet. Is this—is this really an offer of marriage?

CHARLES. I hoped I had made that clear without offensive plainness of speech.

CLARISSA [*Staring at him*] How wonderful!

CHARLES [*Kindly*] Oh! You have the right to expect a high matrimonial alliance.

CLARISSA [*After a humorous glance at him*] But I mean the manner of your proposal.

CHARLES. Surely—

CLARISSA. You are a young man of twenty-one, and I am a girl of nineteen—and you come with an essay on political economy—!

CHARLES. I am a man with heavy responsibilities; not a hero of romance. You will enter a family,

not one of the women of which has ever been talked about, and of which the men have never done anything to be ashamed of.

CLARISSA. Have they ever done *any*thing?

CHARLES. Nothing, thank God. [*Rising*] Well! I think the next thing is to announce our betrothal—

CLARISSA [*Also rising and moving towards the door*] Not quite the next thing. I am very much honoured, Lord Deeford, but I must decline the responsibilities —and the privileges.

CHARLES [*Taken aback*] I beg your pardon—

CLARISSA [*With a great outburst and coming down at him*] O, Charles, Charles! You've made a horrible hash of the whole thing!

[CHARLES *is horrified*]

Yes, for pity's sake, let me talk slang, or I shall have hysterics! I did like you; I liked you very much. You are entirely and spotlessly correct. But I am not. [*Defiantly*] I don't like King Arthur. Galahad makes me yawn. Charles! Ruskin sends me to sleep!—I should die at Dunelm Castle. Your women who have never been talked about, and your men who have never done anything, would make me scream. And oh! those model children!—I want flesh and blood children, who tear their pinafores and smear their faces with jam!

CHARLES. But—Clarissa—!

CLARISSA. I am sorry for you, Charles. It is dreadful to begin life, handicapped with a title and a ready-made position. If I ever marry—and I hope I shall!—my husband will be a man who has got himself into dreadful tangles; so that I may sympathise with him and get him out of them. And he must be

doing things all the time! I want a husband who is at the bottom, and is climbing!—climbing on hands and knees—bleeding hands and bleeding knees,—with his eyes fixed on the summit. Never mind if he never gets there; I can help him to climb, and, if he falls, I can fall with him.

CHARLES. But *I*—!

CLARISSA. No! You were born at the top. You sit in a rarefied atmosphere like the gods on Olympus.

[*She suddenly gives a cry of joy, as she sees* DISRAELI *enter from the drawing-room*]

Ah!

CHARLES [*With an angry look at* DISRAELI, *who remains standing at the door*] I see I had made a mistake.

[*He struts out into the garden*]

DISRAELI. So you have refused him?

CLARISSA [*Surprised*] Oh! How did you know?

DISRAELI. That back was eloquent of refusal. You have no sympathy with ready-made greatness. [*Playfully*] Ah—you are a little Radical.

CLARISSA. Perhaps.

DISRAELI. At heart everybody is. I am.

CLARISSA [*With amused protest*] You!

DISRAELI. Certainly. We want to bring everybody to a uniform level; so as to begin all over again and—rise above everybody.

CLARISSA [*With a laugh*] Is that Radicalism?

DISRAELI. It works out that way. You refuse Deeford because he is a mere descendant; not an ancestor.

CLARISSA. Well? Am I not right?

DISRAELI. He may become an ancestor, you know.

[*She laughs. They sit on the ottoman*]

Are you found of him?

CLARISSA [*Turning to him; thoughtfully and sincerely*] I like him very much. When he forgets Oxford, he can be quite charming. If he had simply said, "Clarissa, will you marry me?" I might have answered, just as simply, "Yes." But he lectured me on model cottages and the model family—!

DISRAELI. I have a very high opinion of him.

CLARISSA [*Amazed*] Why, one of my grievances against him is that he does not appreciate you!

DISRAELI. He is a little less than courteous to me, because he may go through any door in front of me by right of birth. That is so ridiculous that it becomes sublime.

CLARISSA. It is disgusting.

DISRAELI. No. It is a foundation on which to build empires. That conscious superiority is the quality which enables one Englishman to go out among thirty thousand savages and make them fear him, and hate him, and—adore him.

CLARISSA. But he has no initiative!

DISRAELI. Who knows? When he boasted just now about his reforms, his model cottages, he gave me a new insight into his character; showed me there was something in him.

CLARISSA. Then why doesn't he let it come out?

DISRAELI [*Turning to her with a smile*] If the opportunity occurred, he might rise to it.

CLARISSA. A man should make his own opportunities. And it's no use talking. I refused him; and I told him why.

DISRAELI. Did you?

CLARISSA. Quite frankly.

DISRAELI. *Did* you?

CLARISSA [*Almost impatiently*] I told him I must have a man of action, of initiative, a man who tried. [*With a burst of enthusiasm*] O, Mr. Disraeli, one does not live in your company, see you, and listen to you, without learning—

DISRAELI [*Interrupting her gently*] My dear child, I hope you will learn! I hope you will. And you must begin by giving Deeford—

CLARISSA [*Stopping her ears*] Don't. As he is now, I would sooner marry a bricklayer. He *does* lay bricks; and he *may* build a cathedral.

[*Enter* LADY BEACONSFIELD]

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*As she enters and closes door*] Now, Clarissa, you've had more than your share of my Dizzy.

CLARISSA [*Going up to the window*] He has been giving me good advice. [*With a pretty pout at* DISRAELI]—which I am not going to follow;

[*Exit into garden*]

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Going towards window, turns*] Are you coming out?

DISRAELI [*Sitting on the ottoman, thoughtfully*] Deeford has asked Clarissa to marry him.

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Without enthusiasm*] I suppose that's a good match.

DISRAELI. And she has refused him.

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Coming down, interestedly*] Oh?

DISRAELI [*Suddenly rising*] Mary Ann!—I am

going to play fairy godfather and bring them together.

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Laughing*] You! A match-maker! As if you hadn't enough to do!

DISRAELI. Ah! Who knows but this may be the greatest thing I have done. I have been searching for a young man. With such a prize as Clarissa to be won, Deeford may become just what I need. Think what a splendid couple they'd make.

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Beside him*] Ah, Dizzy! always dreaming a romance!

DISRAELI [*Turning to her tenderly*] And living one, my dear, while you are at my side.

[*The* DUCHESS *appears outside the window*]

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Looking off*] The terrible Duchess, and Deeford—and she's looking black.

DISRAELI [*With his back to the window*] Then he's told her of his rejection. Does she appear to be talking much?

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Volumes!

DISRAELI [*With mock fear. Into her ear*] Mary —we'll go for a walk!

[*Exeunt into garden by one window while the* DUCHESS *and* CHARLES *enter by the other*]

DUCHESS [*Very indignant*] I am surprised and shocked. I shall talk to Clarissa.

CHARLES. I fear that will have no effect.

DUCHESS. I am not in the habit of talking without effect!—To what do you attribute her refusal?

CHARLES. May I speak my mind freely?

DUCHESS. Of course.

CHARLES. Then let me say with all respect, I fear she has had her head turned.

DUCHESS. What do you mean? By whom?

CHARLES. By Mr. Disraeli.

DUCHESS [*Shocked and indignant*] Charles!

CHARLES. Pray don't misunderstand me! Clarissa is very young. She has made a hero of this—Jew. He talks to her in his persuasive and magnetic way; fosters her foolish—hum!—her high-flown ideals and enthusiasm. The consequence is that I seem uninteresting—uninspiring—in a word, unromantic!

DUCHESS. I warned Glastonbury something dreadful would happen if we had that person here. What am I to do? The Duke shakes in his shoes at the sight of him.

She sees DISRAELI *in the garden*]

Here he is. I dare not trust myself to speak to him. I'll talk to Clarissa.

CHARLES. And I'll talk to Mr. Disraeli!

DUCHESS. Be careful! [*Exit*]

CHARLES. Oh, *I'm* not afraid of him!

[*He crosses to the escritoire and turns over the leaves of a book*]

[*Enter* DISRAELI *through the window, right. He bows to the* DUCHESS *who goes out through the opposite window haughtily. He smiles and comes down*]

DISRAELI. Ah, Deeford? Courting the Muse?

CHARLES [*Offensively*] No. I neither read novels nor write them.

DISRAELI. Pity. Innocent recreations, both; and the latter lucrative.

CHARLES [*Slamming the book down and commencing a speech*] Mr. Disraeli—

DISRAELI [*Deprecatingly*] There, now! I know that tone of voice so well—

CHARLES [*Coming towards him angrily*] What do you mean, sir?

DISRAELI. It's the tone of an angry man. Now, what can have put you out?

[*At a movement from* CHARLES]

No. Don't speak. Interruptions are annoying. If they hadn't interrupted me the first time I addressed the house, I might have become a vestryman and respectable.

CHARLES. Really, Mr. Disraeli, you make it difficult to talk to you seriously.

DISRAELI. Oh! Never talk seriously. Keep your grave face for your jokes.

CHARLES [*Turning away, disgustedly*] I never make jokes.

DISRAELI. The man who never makes jokes is a standing joke to the world.

CHARLES [*Hotly*] Mr. Disraeli! Clarissa—has refused me.

DISRAELI [*Gravely*] Yes?

CHARLES [*Close to him*] And I, sir,—I attribute her refusal to your influence.

DISRAELI [*Looking at him keenly*] I see I was thoroughly justified in thinking well of you.

CHARLES [*Astonished*] What do you mean?

DISRAELI. You have courage, or you could never say that to me.

CHARLES [*Haughtily*] Pray, why should I not say it?

DISRAELI. Because it is true. And when a very young man speaks an unpleasant truth to a very old one, he shows absolutely reckless courage.

CHARLES. There was no other way.

DISRAELI [*Impatiently, turning away*] A hundred. Do you take a girl's No as final?

CHARLES. I suppose she knows her own mind—

DISRAELI. Highly improbable. But in any case make her change it.

CHARLES. How?

DISRAELI [*Turning to him and smiling*] I am glad you are asking me to help you—because I am interested in you.

CHARLES. Interested in me?

DISRAELI. Deeply.

CHARLES. Why?

DISRAELI. Because England stands in terrible need of men of your stamp.

CHARLES [*Contemptuously*] I cannot see that. England is doing very well. [*With a fine oratorical manner*] She was never so prosperous as now. She has a wise aristocracy, an industrious middle class, and a contented and happy peasantry. Other nations envy her.

DISRAELI [*Applauding*] Splendid! Splendid! How many old Tory squires I've heard talk just like that! And that's how they've talked since the beginning of things. That's how they talked when we lost America; when the Indian mutiny burst upon us; when our soldiers froze and starved in the Crimea; when we deserted Denmark; and when we sat idle while France and Germany flew at each other's throats. It's just that talk that has lost us all our friendships.

CHARLES [*Contemptuously*] Ah! — Continental friendships! Frog-eaters!—Beer-swillers!

DISRAELI [*Very nearly angry—masters himself*] Ah—is that how you talked to Clarissa?

CHARLES. I do not discuss politics with women.

DISRAELI. I do.

[*He takes* CHARLES *by the arm and forces him down on the ottoman*]

See, man! See! England is as isolated as a ship lying off the coast. Her crew know nothing of what they call the land-lubbers. They go on shore now and then for a debauch; and as they only hunt out the vice, they come back with a headache, and righteously thank God they are not as other men! I tell you a ferment is at work all over the world. The spirit of nationality has awakened in France, in Germany, in Italy. New wine has been poured into the old bottles, and an explosion must follow sooner or later. I shall not live to see it, but I hear the seething of the yeast! But you—! My God, what things you will witness! Take care you are not asleep!—All the nations must expand, and everywhere our empire is in their way—Russia, for instance. Now, while England stands alone, while France is crippled, and before Germany has recovered — now is Russia's opportunity to creep towards India and ultimately snatch at her,

and so wipe England off the map. For with India lost, the whole fabric of our empire crumbles, and England sinks into insignificance, with a mortgaged aristocracy, a gambling foreign commerce, a home-trade founded on morbid competition, and a degraded people. [*Rising*] Now do you see why Clarissa refused you? These are the things I have shown her. Do you wonder she wants a man of action? Do you wonder she will not be content with being merely a duke's wife.

CHARLES [*Deeply impressed*] I begin—I begin to see. But what can I do? What can any one man do?

DISRAELI. What one man has already done!

CHARLES. You, sir?—But how can I hope to emulate you?

DISRAELI. You can learn—Will you learn?

CHARLES [*Eagerly*] Will you teach me, sir?

DISRAELI [*With a keen look at him*] Yes.

CHARLES. How can I begin?

DISRAELI. Leave your small ideals; or, better still, grow from small ideals to greater. You *have* begun—*well;* you are setting your house in order, —now pass on! Pass from the parish to the empire!

CHARLES. The parish! How small it seems! And everything I've done in politics, how utterly insignificant.

DISRAELI. In politics nothing is insignificant.

CHARLES [*Laughing bitterly*] Contrast it with this question of India.

DISRAELI. Whether we hold it or lose it?

CHARLES. Yes! Yes! What is the solution—War?

DISRAELI [*Turning away*] War is never a solution; War is an aggravation.

CHARLES [*Eagerly*] What, then, is the solution?

DISRAELI [*Turns and looks at him steadily awhile as if deciding whether he is fit to be told, then comes close to him, and speaks almost in a whisper*] A very small thing; a thing men are laughing at.

[*The handle of the door L. is almost imperceptibly moved.* DISRAELI *sees it*]

CHARLES. What, sir, what?

DISRAELI. A ditch. A ditch dug in sand.

CHARLES [*Puzzled*] A ditch— ?

DISRAELI. A ditch, dug in shifting sand.

CHARLES [*Eagerly*] You mean the—

[DISRAELI *swiftly motions him to silence, and slowly approaches the door left*]

CHARLES [*Watching him with amazement*] Why, sir? Surely this secluded room in a private house, is, of all places, the most secure—

[DISRAELI *opens the breakfast-room door.* MRS. TRAVERS *follows the opening door with her hand on the outer handle. She conceals a book she is carrying*]

DISRAELI [*Apologising profusely*] I beg your pardon!

MRS. TRAVERS [*Quite unperturbed*] Thank you so much. Dear Clarissa left her book—

DISRAELI. A fortunate circumstance for us. What was the book?

MRS. TRAVERS. *Sybil.*

[*She makes a pretence of looking for the book*]

DISRAELI. I have heard of it. Now, where can it be?

[*He makes a great show of looking for it, but keeps an eye on her*]

Do help us, Deeford. Remember, a ditch in sand gives the best soil for celery.

[*To* MRS. TRAVERS *while they are all ostensibly hunting*]

We were in the thick of a very interesting discussion. Some people say loam—

MRS. TRAVERS. Really?

DISRAELI. And some advocate a fertilizer—

[MRS. TRAVERS *turns and, seeing* DISRAELI'S *back towards her, slips the book behind a piece of furniture.* DISRAELI *sees her*]

But I say sand.

MRS. TRAVERS [*Still apparently looking for the book*] Sand?

[*During the thick of the hunt, enter the* DUKE, *followed by* LADY BEACONSFIELD, LORD *and* LADY CUDWORTH, LORD *and* LADY BROOKE *and* CLARISSA]

DUKE [*Cheerfully*] What are you all playing? Hide-and-seek?

DISRAELI. Something like it, Duke. [*He finds the book*] Ah! There it is! Now isn't that remarkable? [*He stoops to pick it up*]

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Now, Dizzy, you know you are not to stoop.

DISRAELI. Ah, but to pick up things one must.

[*To* MRS. TRAVERS, *handing her the book*] Mustn't one?

[*She looks at him in a half-smiling, half-puzzled way*]

DUCHESS [*Entering unconscious of anything unusual*] I have arranged we are all to picnic in the Abbey ruins to-morrow.

DISRAELI. Dear Duchess, I am deeply grieved, but we shall not be able to avail ourselves of your exquisite hospitality beyond to-day—

DUCHESS [*Coldly*] Oh—? I am sorry. But, of course—Deeford, will you drive the drag?

DISRAELI. Deeford is coming with us.

[*A general movement of astonishment.* CHARLES *looks expectantly towards* DISRAELI]

DUCHESS [*Turning round sharply*] What?

DISRAELI. I require his assistance.

DUCHESS [*Amazed and indignant*] "Require his assistance"!—

DISRAELI. He has done me the honour of accepting a secretaryship.

[*Exclamations*]

MRS. TRAVERS. How unexpected!—Lord Deeford working!—Clarissa! Isn't that unexpected?

CLARISSA [*With a smile, looking at* CHARLES] Not altogether.

MRS. TRAVERS. And *how* he'll have to work. [*To* DISRAELI] You will have so many things to teach him.

CHARLES [*Looking at* CLARISSA] Mr. Disraeli has already begun.

DISRAELI. Yes, I have been teaching him what it took me many years to learn.

MRS. TRAVERS. And what is that?

DISRAELI [*Turning slowly round and looking at her; very gravely*] Dear lady, that a ditch dug in sand gives the best soil for celery.

CURTAIN

ACT II

ACT II

In Downing Street

DISRAELI'S *private room in Downing Street. On the left a large window opens on a glass-covered balcony full of evergreens and flowers. At the back, towards the left, a door; another door in the right corner, and a third door in front, on the right. In the centre of the room a great writing-table, with a chair behind it. Two other chairs R. and L. of table. On the wall a case of maps, engraved portraits of statesmen. The general aspect of the room is solemn and dignified, not to say heavy. The table is littered with documents, blue books and letters. A smaller table in front, on the left, below the window, with a chair in front of it. At the back, a monumental fireplace, above which is a life-size portrait of Queen Victoria.*

[*The room is empty, as the curtain rises. Presently* FOLJAMBE *opens the door in the right corner cautiously and peers into the room; he is about to enter, but withdraws quickly as the entrance door on the right is opened and* MR. TEARLE *enters with letters, some unopened, which he places on the small table left; others, opened, which he places on the large table in the centre.* MR. TEARLE *exit. In the meantime* FOLJAMBE *has been seen watching him furtively. As soon as* MR. TEARLE *has gone,* FOLJAMBE *slips in with catlike swiftness. He stands at the left corner of the writing-table facing and watching the entrance door. With one*

hand he shuffles the letters, and at the same time peers at them. His eye falls on an open letter. This he coaxes towards him and tries to read out of the corner of his eye. Enter DISRAELI *suddenly, followed by* MR. TEARLE. FOLJAMBE *stands quite unembarrassed*]

DISRAELI [*Pleasantly*] Good morning, Mr. Foljambe—[*To* TEARLE] You did not tell me Mr. Foljambe was waiting.

TEARLE. He was not here, sir. Your personal letters are on the table, sir.

DISRAELI [*To him*] Thank you, Mr. Tearle. [*Sits in the chair behind the table*]

[*Exit* TEARLE *through the door in the right corner*]

[DISRAELI *looks at* FOLJAMBE *enquiringly*]

FOLJAMBE. I have come on a personal matter, sir.

DISRAELI. Yes? [*Glances over his letters and makes pencil notes on their backs*]

FOLJAMBE [*In the tone of a just man with a grievance*] I have had the honour of being here some time—

DISRAELI. Yes?

FOLJAMBE. I feel I can be of little use to you under present circumstances.

DISRAELI. I don't understand.

FOLJAMBE. If I may venture to say so, with all possible respect, you seem to be keeping me at arm's length.

DISRAELI [*Protesting*] Oh!—Your presence at my elbow now is a proof to the contrary.

FOLJAMBE. But I am not in the close touch with you I had hope for. No important matters have been

entrusted to me. Even my room is upstairs—a long way off.

DISRAELI. Patience! Patience! You will remember I told you I must observe you a little while. I have been doing so. The result is just what I expected.

FOLJAMBE. I am very grateful, sir. May I hope—?

DISRAELI. Yes. Henceforth I will keep you busy. Matters of great consequence are coming up to-day—

FOLJAMBE [*Eagerly*] Yes, sir?

DISRAELI. Yes, Mr. Foljambe; I may say one matter of National importance.

FOLJAMBE [*Eagerly*] Of—er—Imperial importance, sir?

DISRAELI. Yes, even Imperial importance.

FOLJAMBE. Indeed, sir!

DISRAELI. For unless the heart be sound the whole body must suffer.

FOLJAMBE. You allude, sir, to—

DISRAELI. I allude to drainage.

FOLJAMBE [*Disappointed*] Drainage? [*Then insinuatingly*] Ah, abroad? The drainage of waste-places, the drainage of a desert?

DISRAELI. No, no, Mr. Foljambe, the drainage of London. A great scheme. Enormous expense. I am trying to arrange a loan. [*Handing him a package of papers from table*] Here are the papers—you might glance through them.

FOLJAMBE [*Crestfallen, taking the papers*] Is there nothing else, sir?

DISRAELI. Yes, yes. [*Picks up a blue document*] This contains the report of the Secretary of State for India on the coaling stations and fortifications of

the Gulf of Aden. Dry stuff, I fear. Let me see; where *is* the Gulf of Aden? [*He rises and goes over to maps; unrolls the map of Africa. Turning to* FOLJAMBE, *who has followed him*] Where is the Gulf of Aden? [FOLJAMBE *promptly points it out*] You're familiar with the country, I see. [FOLJAMBE *starts slightly.* DISRAELI *examines the map*] Ah, yes, very unhealthy climate, I believe.

FOLJAMBE [*Deliberately*] The district will grow in importance with the development of the Suez Canal.

DISRAELI [*With contempt*] Oh, the Suez Canal! Silting up, sir; silting up. [*Returns to his table*]

[DEEFORD *enters. He carries several large official blue envelopes, sealed*]

Ah, Deeford!

CHARLES [*Very businesslike*] Despatches from Cairo, sir.

[*He places them on* DISRAELI'S *table, and passes on to his table on the left, where he sits and commences working at documents*]

FOLJAMBE. What do you wish me to do with these papers, sir?

DISRAELI. In a moment. [*Picks up an engagement card and crosses to* DEEFORD. FOLJAMBE *edges towards the table, glancing at the Cairo despatches*] We shall have a very busy day to-day, Deeford. I lunch with the Goldsmiths' Company at one; I have to respond to the toast of Literature. Must say something nice about poor dear Lytton. Thinks he can write novels.

[*They laugh*]

This afternoon Lady Salisbury has a garden party at Hatfield. I do hope it won't rain.

[DISRAELI *turns his head slightly to glance out of window,* FOLJAMBE *quickly snatches up one despatch to look at the one underneath ;* DISRAELI *sees this out of the corner of his eye but continues*]

To-night Lady Beaconsfield and I dine informally at the French Embassy—admirable cooking!—We have promised to look in later at the Lyceum to see Irving's "Hamlet." I shall probably sup with him at the Beefsteak Club. A strenuous day, Deeford.

CHARLES [*Laughing*] But no work, sir!

DISRAELI. The less a Prime Minister does, the fewer mistakes he is apt to make. [*Smiling*] That's rather good. Mr. Foljambe, please make a note of that.

[FOLJAMBE, *watching* DISRAELI, *deliberately puts the papers which* DISRAELI *gave him on the top of the despatches, then makes a note in a note-book which he carries*]

The less a Prime Minister—I must say that at Manchester—Manchester will appreciate that. And it will infuriate John Bright. He has no sense of humour.

[CHARLES *and* DISRAELI laugh. FOLJAMBE *having made the note, now picks up the papers and with them the despatches, and moves towards his door as* DISRAELI *comes to him*]

DISRAELI [*Glancing at the table as he comes up to* FOLJAMBE, *and noticing that the despatches are gone*]

You might take up your quarters in the next room—it's more handy. I hope to see a great deal more of you. You have the papers? [*Looking through the papers in* FOLJAMBE'S *hand, fingering them and turning them over*] Oh, these are the despatches from Cairo.

FOLJAMBE [*Confused*] I beg your pardon, sir.

DISRAELI. Oh, a very natural mistake. [*Takes them and replaces them on the table*]

[*Enter* LADY BEACONSFIELD, *dressed to go out*]

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Aren't you coming this morning?

[CHARLES *rises at once and places a chair for her*]

DISRAELI [*Behind the writing-table*] I'm afraid you must enjoy the park without me, Mary. I am expecting a very important visitor.

[*To* FOLJAMBE] That reminds me. Mr. Meyers is coming presently—

FOLJAMBE [*Impressed*] Mr. Hugh Meyers—?

DISRAELI. Mr. Hugh Meyers, the banker and millionaire. I may require your assistance.

FOLJAMBE. I shall be here all the morning.

DISRAELI. Thank you. [*As* FOLJAMBE *lingers*] Is there anything else?

FOLJAMBE [*Indicating the papers which* DISRAELI *is still holding*] Those papers, sir.

DISRAELI. Oh—to be sure! There. [*Holding them while* FOLJAMBE *takes one end*] The blue one—and the white one. Blue and white—that's curious—

[*Their eyes meet,* FOLJAMBE *frankly puzzled*]

Thank you.

[*Exit* FOLJAMBE]

[DISRAELI *goes up with him, then turns. To* CHARLES *who is at the writing-table making notes on a document*]

Charming man, isn't he?

CHARLES [*Hesitating*] Yes—

DISRAELI [*With a laugh*] That was a very negative yes.

CHARLES. He never looks one in the face.

DISRAELI. Ah—it's the man who does look one in the face one must have doubts about.

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Anxiously*] Dizzy—why is Mr. Meyers coming to see you?

DISRAELI [*With exaggerated gravity*] On very urgent business, my dear.

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Is it anything personal, Dizzy?

DISRAELI [*To* CHARLES] Deeford, this saint married me when I was up to my neck in debt; and I do believe she thinks I am going to borrow money of Meyers now.

[CHARLES *laughs*]

LADY BEACONSFIELD. I believe whatever you tell me. But this is the first time you have not taken me into your confidence.

DISRAELI. You shall know in half an hour.

[BASCOT, *a footman in morning livery and bearing a card on a small salver, enters and comes to* DISRAELI]

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Well—! I shall cut my drive short, and I shan't enjoy it a bit. [*Rises*]

DISRAELI [*Rising, leans over the table and lays an affectionate hand on* LADY BEACONSFIELD'S *arm,*

taking the card at the same time and glancing at it] There! There! Come back in a quarter of an hour. [*After looking at the card*] Oh, wait a moment. [*To* BASCOT] Show him in. Here *is* Mr. Meyers. [*To* LADY BEACONSFIELD] Now you'll see he's not so very terrible.

[BASCOT *opens the door, announces "Mr. Hugh Meyers" and exit. Enter* MEYERS, *a charming man, with only the faintest traces of the Jew*]

DISRAELI [*Meeting him at the door and shaking hands with him*] Good morning, Mr. Meyers. Lady Beaconsfield—Lord Deeford.

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*After acknowledging* MEYERS, *passes on to the door, turns and says playfully to* DISRAELI] I shall be back in ten minutes!

DISRAELI [*Holding the door open for her*] The sooner the better, my dear.

[*Exit* LADY BEACONSFIELD]

[*He utters a sigh of happiness, closes the door and comes to* MEYERS]

Ah!—Well, Deeford—observe this unassuming gentleman. You would pass him in the street without the faintest idea you had rubbed elbows with one of the world's greatest powers!

MEYERS [*Modestly*] Oh! You embarrass me! Nothing is so easy as making money when that is the only thing you make. Once you have five pounds what is to prevent your having five millions?

DISRAELI. Charles, can we scrape five pounds together between us?

[CHARLES *and* MEYERS *laugh*]

MEYERS [*With fond regret*] Ah—but my millions will not keep the daisies out of my lawn!

DISRAELI. No, sir, but they give you the lawn. [*Breaks off*] Oh, excuse me [*Goes up toward the bell-pull*] I want to introduce you to the excellent Mr. Foljambe. A very promising assistant clerk of mine. [*To* TEARLE, *who appears*] Mr. Foljambe, please.

[*Exit* TEARLE]

[DISRAELI *comes down to* MEYERS. CHARLES *has gone back to his work*]

MEYERS [*Quietly to* DISRAELI] The money will be ready.

DISRAELI [*to* CHARLES] Do you hear him, Deeford? He is speaking of millions.

MEYERS [*Casually*] Four or five millions, I think you said.

DISRAELI. But explain. I am bad at business technique.

MEYERS. It's a considerable sum.

DISRAELI. Considerable—! Hear him!

MEYERS. Two millions I have in London. For the rest, I have withdrawn my credit in Petersburg, and am bringing it back in gold.

DISRAELI. Explain again.

MEYERS. My Petersburg house advises me—

DISRAELI. One moment. Is the money coming from Russia?

MEYERS. Yes.

DISRAELI. Ha! That's good. Go on, Mr. Meyers.

MEYERS. My Petersburg house advises me that the bullion has been shipped to London. In due course it will be transferred to the bank.

DISRAELI. The bank? What bank?

MEYERS. The Bank of England, naturally.

DISRAELI. That's rather humorous, too,

[*Enter* FOLJAMBE. *He stands waiting respectfully but listening with all his ears*]

MEYERS. Why?

DISRAELI. Nothing. I was thinking of Probert. How long will the whole transaction take?

MEYERS. My Petersburg correspondent [FOLJAMBE *makes a slight movement*] tells me the money will be at my disposal in the Bank of England inside of three weeks.

DISRAELI [*To* FOLJAMBE] This is Mr. Hugh Meyers [*To* MEYERS, *patting* FOLJAMBE'S *shoulder*] Such a worker. [*To* FOLJAMBE] What was the precise sum required for the Drainage of London Scheme?

[MEYERS *and* CHARLES *show surprise.* FOLJAMBE *glances at them keenly*]

FOLJAMBE. I am afraid I cannot say off-hand, sir.

DISRAELI. Kindly look up the figures for me.

FOLJAMBE. Certainly, sir.

DISRAELI. You have the paper, you know; the white one.

[*Exit* FOLJAMBE]

MEYERS [*Puzzled*] The Drainage of London Scheme?

CHARLES [*Laughing*] How unromantic! And how disappointing!

DISRAELI [*Stops; with a sharp look at him*] Why?

CHARLES. I had hoped Mr. Meyers had come on a much more important matter.

DISRAELI. Oh ?—What ?

CHARLES. The Suez Canal.

[MEYERS *looks reproachfully at* DISRAELI, CHARLES *becomes confused, realising that he has blundered*]

DISRAELI [*After a pause, to* CHARLES, *coldly*] Indeed ?—Mr. Meyers, shall we go into the next room ?

[*He moves to the door in the left corner, opens it, and* MEYERS *passes out*]

[*Then he comes down to* CHARLES] You're quite right, it *is* the Suez Canal. As you have hit upon the truth, it is better I should tell you, that until I am ready [*With emphasis*] not a syllable must be breathed on this matter. Is that clear ?

CHARLES [*Earnestly*] On my honour, sir.

DISRAELI. Thank you.

[*Exit after* MEYERS]

So sorry to keep you waiting, Mr. Meyers—

[CHARLES *utters a surprised whistle. Then he sits at his writing-table with his back to the room. Enter* FOLJAMBE *with papers. He looks around, surprised at* DISRAELI'S *absence*]

FOLJAMBE [*Coming down*] Mr. Disraeli, sir ?

CHARLES [*Pointing without looking up*] In there,

FOLJAMBE. With Meyers ?

CHARLES [*Stiffly*] With *Mr.* Meyers. Yes.

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FOLJAMBE [*Coming nearer*] Here are the papers.

CHARLES [*Still engrossed in his work*] Thank you.

FOLJAMBE [*Moving quickly towards the door on the left*] Shall I take them in?

CHARLES. No. Give them to me.

FOLJAMBE [*Coming down behind* CHARLES; *persistent*] Will *you* take them in, my lord?

CHARLES [*Curtly*] Presently.

FOLJAMBE. But—

CHARLES [*Short*] Presently.

FOLJAMBE [*Insidiously*] Ah! I *thought* the papers weren't wanted!

CHARLES [*Surprised, but only half attending*] Eh?

FOLJAMBE. Mr. Meyers wasn't sent for for a paltry half-million!

CHARLES [*Curtly*] I am very busy.

FOLJAMBE [*Comes to the back of* CHARLES'S *chair, watching* CHARLES *keenly*] He's here for the Suez Canal.

[CHARLES *leaps out of his chair and wheels round. The two men stand facing each other. Enter* BASCOT]

BASCOT [*Announcing*] Lady Clarissa Pevensey and Mrs. Travers.

[FOLJAMBE *looks quickly towards the door at the mention of* MRS. TRAVERS *and goes up behind* DISRAELI'S *table*]

CHARLES [*Mastering himself, to* FOLJAMBE, *dismissing him*] Thank you, Mr. Foljambe.

[*A burst of laughter from the ladies outside.* FOLJAMBE *goes towards his door. Enter* CLARISSA *followed by* MRS. TRAVERS. FOLJAMBE *and* MRS. TRAVERS *exchange a look,* BASCOT *exit, closing the door*]

[FOLJAMBE *approaches* MRS. TRAVERS *as if to speak to her, she motions him to be still; he retires towards his door, hastily writes on a leaf of his notebook, tears off the leaf, folds it, places it on the mantelpiece, and exit*]

[MRS. TRAVERS, *watching* CHARLES *and* CLARISSA, *takes the paper unobserved*]

CLARISSA [*As she enters, brightly*] Here's an invasion! [*Shakes hands with* CHARLES]

CHARLES [*Speaking to both the ladies*] I am more than delighted—[*He turns to* CLARISSA]

CLARISSA. Agatha is staying in Berkeley Square with us on our way to Scotland. We came to take Lady Beaconsfield into the park, but she has gone. Agatha wanted to see Mr. Disraeli's sanctum, and, to tell the truth, *I* was dying to see how you look in the throes of toil.

CHARLES [*Laughing*] Oh, the throes of toil haven't undermined my constitution yet.

MRS. TRAVERS [*Having safely got the paper, and hidden it in her glove*] We expected to find you with a wet towel round your head—

CHARLES. So far I've done nothing but look on.

CLARISSA. I thought you seemed worried when we came in.

MRS. TRAVERS. Which is *the* pen, Lord Deeford?

CHARLES. Eh? I beg your pardon?

MRS. TRAVERS. The pen which is mightier than the sword!—Mr. Benjamin Disraeli's own pen.

CHARLES. Oh! [*Laughs*] Behold it! [*He solemnly hands her a very shabby quill*]

MRS. TRAVERS [*Holding it up, with romantic admiration*] Oh happy bird that bore this quill!

CHARLES. Yes, but that didn't prevent its being eaten at Michaelmas.

MRS. TRAVERS [*Still holding it up*] Shame! Shame! It should have been pensioned in some green meadow by a running stream.

CLARISSA. What a sight it would have looked with all its quills gone!

MRS. TRAVERS. Ah! You have no reverence! No sense of awe! [*She reverentially puts down the quill*]

[*Enter* LADY BEACONSFIELD]

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Bascot told me you were here.

[CLARISSA *and she meet and kiss.* LADY BEACONSFIELD *then turns to* MRS. TRAVERS]

How d'ye do! [*To* CHARLES] Where is Mr. Disraeli?

MRS. TRAVERS [*Hastily*] Closeted with Mr. Meyers.

CLARISSA [*Amazed, to* MRS. TRAVERS] Why, how could you guess that?

MRS. TRAVERS [*Realising her slip*] Oh—I recognised Mr. Meyer's brougham at the door. A financier! How dull!

[CHARLES *goes to his own table*]

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Dull! I'm on tenterhooks!

[*Enter* DISRAELI *and* MEYERS; *they are both radiant*]

Ah! At last!

DISRAELI [*To* LADY BEACONSFIELD] Well, well, well! Back already? [*To* CLARISSA] Come to see the neophyte? Ah, Mrs. Travers? [*Glancing towards* MEYERS] Do you know, I am not as surprised as you might expect by this visit. Allow me. [*Presenting*] Mr. Hugh Meyers—Lady Clarissa Pevensey—Mrs.—ah—Travers.

[MRS. TRAVERS *goes up to* MEYERS *smiling; they shake hands.* DISRAELI *comes to* LADY BEACONSFIELD]

Now, my dear, we'll let you into the secret. [*Takes her to the entrance door. She passes out*] Mr. Meyers. [MEYERS *comes to him*] We can tell Lady Beaconsfield now.

[*Exit* MEYERS]

[*To* CHARLES] I shall not be gone five minutes.

[*Exit* DISRAELI]

MRS. TRAVERS [*Who has been watching them closely*] Well! That's a nice thing! Leaves us *plantés!* And why is Lady Beaconsfield so excited? [*To* CHARLES, *laughingly*] Was this a momentous interview?

CHARLES [*Stiffly*] I really cannot tell you.

MRS. TRAVERS. That means it was. Oh, how proud you must feel to be in all the State secrets.

CHARLES. But I am not.

MRS. TRAVERS [*Indicating letters, etc.*] But all the correspondence—

CHARLES. It is meaningless to me. I am like

an apothecary's apprentice. I pound the drugs in a mortar; but I haven't the smallest idea of their properties.

CLARISSA [*Who has been looking at the flowers in the greenhouse, turns suddenly struck by his tone*] How humbly you speak of yourself!

CHARLES [*To* CLARISSA] That is the point I have reached. I now know that I know nothing.

CLARISSA [*Demurely*] That is a great stride towards your goal, isn't it?

CHARLES [*Eagerly*] Is it?

CLARISSA. I think so. [*She smiles and turns away to the window*]

CHARLES. Are you admiring our famous window-garden?

CLARISSA. Poor London plants, dreaming of blue skies!

CHARLES. Come and look at them; when they see your eyes their dream will be realised.

CLARISSA [*Amused*] Giant strides, Charles! [*She goes into the greenhouse*]

CHARLES [*Shyly to* MRS. TRAVERS] May I?

MRS. TRAVERS [*Laughing*] Yes. But let an old woman sit still and rest her weary bones.

[CHARLES *places a chair for* MRS. TRAVERS *and follows* CLARISSA]

[MRS. TRAVERS *sits at the writing-table. She draws* FOLJAMBE'S *note out of her glove: reads it, looks on the table. Picks up a paper knife; toys with it; beats a tattoo with it on the table. As at a preconcerted signal, enter* FOLJAMBE *quickly with papers. He nearly closes the door and stands against it*]

FOLJAMBE [*Under his breath*] Agatha—

MRS. TRAVERS [*Indicating the greenhouse*] Sh!—Meyers?

FOLJAMBE. Yes.

MRS. TRAVERS. About the Canal?

FOLJAMBE. Yes.

MRS. TRAVERS. They are agreed.

FOLJAMBE. How do you know?

MRS. TRAVERS. Both radiant.

FOLJAMBE [*Eagerly*] Then—?

MRS. TRAVERS. Cairo. Start now.

[FOLJAMBE *makes a movement of protest*]

Now!

FOLJAMBE. Instructions?

MRS. TRAVERS. At Trieste.

FOLJAMBE. [*Surprised*] Trieste? How do I go?

MRS. TRAVERS. By way of Ostend.

FOLJAMBE. Ostend?

[DISRAELI *enters. He catches the last word, but does not betray anything. He comes directly to* MRS. TRAVERS]

DISRAELI. All alone, Mrs. Travers?

FOLJAMBE [*Ostentatiously closing the door behind him as if he had just entered, and coming down*] The estimates you were asking for, sir.

DISRAELI. Oh, thank you. We managed on a rough guess. [*To* MRS. TRAVERS] Mr. Foljambe. Such a worker! [*To* FOLJAMBE] Sorry I put you to so much trouble.

FOLJAMBE. A great pleasure, sir. [*Goes towards his door*]

[DISRAELI *turns to* MRS. TRAVERS, *then with a glance at* FOLJAMBE]

DISRAELI. And how is your poor husband, Mrs. Travers?

[FOLJAMBE *at the door turns quickly; then exit*]

MRS. TRAVERS [*Saint-like*] Just the same. At Kissingen, you know.

DISRAELI. Too bad, too bad. What have you done with the young people?

MRS. TRAVERS [*Pointing over her shoulder to the greenhouse with the paper-knife she is still holding*] There. [*Rises; puts the knife down*] Will you kindly make my excuses to Clarissa?

DISRAELI. You are not going so abruptly?

MRS. TRAVERS. I have to accompany the dear Duchess. She is organising a bazaar, and I am secretary.

DISRAELI [*Taking her hand*] Ah—always occupied with good works. Always with your hand in some great undertaking. In secret, too.

[*She protests, laughing*]

MRS. TRAVERS [*Going towards the entrance door*] Oh!—It has been a great privilege to see the sanctuary.

[DISRAELI *accompanies her, holds the door open*]

Not a step, Mr. Disraeli—not a step.

DISRAELI. A sanctuary indeed, since you have graced it.

MRS. TRAVERS. Oh, thank you.

DISRAELI. You look charming to-day—charming. [*Calling to* BASCOT] Bascot.

MRS. TRAVERS. Oh, thank you. Good-bye. *Good-bye.*

[*He shows her out graciously, closes the door and stands there thinking. He mutters "Ostend, Ostend." He comes slowly to his table, and inspects it closely to see if anything has been disarranged. Finding nothing, he picks up the paper-knife and sitting down falls to thinking again. While he is in deep thought he abstractedly beats a tattoo on the table with the paper-knife*]

FOLJAMBE [*Quickly opens his door, but starts back on seeing* DISRAELI] Oh, I—I beg your pardon, sir. I thought you called. [*Disappears*]

[DISRAELI *has turned sharply to him; then looking at the paper-knife in his hand he realises the use it has been put to, and that* FOLJAMBE *and* MRS. TRAVERS *have met. He throws the knife down in disgust and calls* CHARLES]

DISRAELI. Charles!

[CHARLES *and* CLARISSA *come in from the balcony*]

[*To* CLARISSA] Sorry to interrupt you. [*To* CHARLES] Did Foljambe ever bring those papers?

CHARLES [*Going to his table and sitting*] Oh, yes. Long ago.

DISRAELI [*Rising*] Ah! Why didn't you send him in with them?

CHARLES. I thought you would not like to be disturbed.

DISRAELI [*Coming over to* CHARLES] Quite right. Did he say anything?

CHARLES. I thought him rather impertinent.

DISRAELI [*Carelessly*] Oh? How?

CLARISSA. Shall I go?

DISRAELI. No, my dear. [*To* CHARLES] Well?

CHARLES. He asked questions.

DISRAELI. Yes?

CHARLES [*Turning round*] But I snubbed him. Finally he had the impertinence to say you were seeing Meyers about—[*He looks at* CLARISSA *and stops*]

DISRAELI [*Impatiently*] Well?

CHARLES. Am I to speak in Lady Clarissa's presence?

DISRAELI. Yes, yes! Go on!

CHARLES. About the Suez Canal.

DISRAELI. And what did you say?

CHARLES [*Rather indignant*] Not a word, of course.

DISRAELI. Oh?—[*After a pause*] Then how did you snub him?

CHARLES [*Repeating his action with* FOLJAMBE] I merely stood up—and looked at him.

DISRAELI [*Throwing up his hands in horror*] Oh!—

CHARLES [*Amazed*] What?

DISRAELI. What more could you have told him if you had talked an hour?

CHARLES [*Hotly*] Do you accuse me of speaking?

DISRAELI [*Sternly*] No, sir. I accuse you of holding your tongue too eloquently.

CHARLES. Oh, well! He is easily muzzled.

DISRAELI. How?

CHARLES. Put him on his parole. I'll fetch him. [*He goes quickly towards* FOLJAMBE'S *door*]

DISRAELI [*Ringing*] Ah! Capital! Fetch him by all means.

[CHARLES *goes out*]

DISRAELI. Mr. Tearle! Mr. Tearle!

[TEARLE *appears*]

Send for the senior Queen's messenger at once.

[TEARLE *exit*]

CLARISSA [*Who has been watching intently*] Has Charles made a mistake?

DISRAELI. A horrible one. [*To* CHARLES *who re-enters*] Well? He's not there?

CHARLES [*Crestfallen*] He is not in his room, sir.

DISRAELI. No?—Shall I tell you where he is? He is at Victoria Station, catching the ten-thirty express on his way to Ostend, to Trieste, and so to Alexandria.

CHARLES [*Alarmed*] For God's sake, sir, who is he?

DISRAELI. He is Mrs. Traver's husband.

[CLARISSA *and* CHARLES *utter a cry of amazement*]

Yes! He and she are agents—spies—sent here to discover—what you have told them.

CHARLES. Have him arrested!

DISRAELI. On what grounds? What has he done?

CHARLES. Why did you employ him, knowing he was a spy?

DISRAELI. *Because* I knew it! Because I wanted to have him under my eye! For weeks he has been seen entering this room secretly. I knew it. [*Indicating papers on the table*] I've laid traps for him—

letters for him to read. I had him on a false scent, when you—

CHARLES [*Miserably*] When I blundered—

DISRAELI. When you lost control of your muscles.

CHARLES. Is there nothing I can say or do?

DISRAELI. I fear not.

CLARISSA. Will you tell us why silence is so important—?

DISRAELI. Oh, now it's of no importance whatever.

[CLARISSA *sits in* DISRAELI'S *chair behind the table despairingly*]

Yes—[*To* CHARLES] You ought to know, so that in future——

CHARLES [*Miserably*] Future! What future is there for me?

DISRAELI. So that in future you may control your features as well as your tongue. Sit down!

[CHARLES *sits at the right of the table.* DISRAELI *stands facing him.* CLARISSA *and* CHARLES *listen to him intently*]

Ismail Pasha, Khedive of Egypt, is under the impression he is Rameses the Great; but the only Pyramid he has raised is a pyramid of debt. Egypt is a dry bone, out of which he has sucked the last ounce of marrow. The last assets he has are the controlling shares in the Suez Canal, and these he is dying to sell to the highest bidder. France built the canal, but is too poor to buy it. Russia covets it as a means of snatching at India; England, as a means of defending it. Both pretend the purchase is the last thing they are thinking of; both are watching each other like cats; and Ismail sits and

waits for the cat to jump. [*With emphasis*] Those shares I mean to have!—

CLARISSA *and* CHARLES. Ah!

DISRAELI. The Bank of England refused to back me; but to-day Meyers has given me a blank cheque. I thought the thing was done. But now Foljambe knows—Russia knows. In a week Foljambe will be in Cairo, and whatever sum I offer he will double. Now do you see the importance of it?

CHARLES. And all because I was startled!

DISRAELI. Yes.

CLARISSA. Is there no remedy?

DISRAELI. Of course there is.

CHARLES [*Eagerly*] What, sir? What?

DISRAELI. I must send a man to the Khedive with unlimited powers; ready to outbid anything, and ready to pay on the nail.

CHARLES. What must be the man's qualifications?

DISRAELI. Ah—! A strong, suave, silent man; subtle and cunning; fighting wiliness with wiliness.

[CLARISSA *bows her head on the table in tears*]

CHARLES [*Anxiously*] Have you such a man, sir?

DISRAELI [*Sharply*] I've sent for him. [*To* CLARISSA *who is weeping silently*] Why, child, what is the matter? [*He comes to her, quickly*] What is it, Clarissa?

CLARISSA. Oh, don't take any notice! I am childish this morning. I suppose it is disappointment. For a moment—while you were speaking—I had hoped—that perhaps—[*She is looking at* CHARLES]

CHARLES [*Distressed*] Ah, don't say it, Clarissa! Don't say it!

DISRAELI [*Looking at* CHARLES, *and speaking slowly but with growing enthusiasm*] Yes. Do say it, Clarissa. Do say it. Because there is another kind of a man who might be twice as useful.

CLARISSA [*Eagerly*] What kind— ?

DISRAELI [*Coming toward* CHARLES] A man so honest that the rogues would think him a rogue; so truthful that they'd swear he was lying; so simple that they'd never fathom him—

CHARLES [*Rising indignantly*] Why laugh at me, sir ? I feel my folly bitterly enough !

DISRAELI. What is the matter, Deeford ?

CHARLES. Disgust—utter disgust with myself. And despair.

[TEARLE *appears*]

DISRAELI. Why despair ?

TEARLE. The Queen's messenger !

DISRAELI [*Sharply*] Not wanted ! [*To* CHARLES] You are the man !

[*Exit* TEARLE]

[CHARLES *and* CLARISSA *utter a cry of amazement*]

CHARLES. I— ? I, to be trusted with this mission after what I have done ?

DISRAELI. Why not ?

CHARLES. Am I the man you want ? Ah, you know I'm not. I am a useless, conceited idler—a perfect and complete fool !

DISRAELI. Well—granting that—[*To* CLARISSA] I didn't say it—[*to* CHARLES] but granting that, that is a very good reason for sending you.

CHARLES. But I have failed already !

DISRAELI. Nearly all my successes in life are founded on previous failures. On your own showing

nobody will suspect you. You have only to meet all the cunning with that stolid British face of yours, and the schemers will be disarmed. Come! Will you go?

CHARLES [*Enthusiastically*] Will I go?

CLARISSA [*Rising excitedly and coming towards* CHARLES] Ah!

DISRAELI. Aha! There's your man of action, Clarissa! [*Slowly to* CHARLES] I warn you! There will be grave danger! Are you ready to meet it?

CHARLES. Gladly!

DISRAELI. I mean—danger of—death!

CHARLES [*Quietly*] Yes, sir!

CLARISSA [*Looking at* CHARLES, *repeats the word with a new horror*] Death!

DISRAELI [*To her*] Every step of the way—every hour of the day—danger lurking in every seductive disguise. When once he is in Egypt, if his errand be known, his life will not be worth a moment's purchase.

CLARISSA [*Her eyes fixed on* CHARLES] I didn't know—I didn't know!

DISRAELI [*Tenderly grave*] Clarissa, my child, do you forbid him to go?

CLARISSA. I—I cannot forbid.

DISRAELI. Oh yes, you can. He shall obey you. But think a moment. If you forbid him, and he obeys, and I send that other man—how will you feel?

CHARLES [*Appealing softly*] Clarissa!

[*The two men watch her intently*]

CLARISSA [*After a struggle with herself; bravely, simply*] You must go!

DISRAELI *and* CHARLES [*Together*] Ah!

DISRAELI. Well done! [*He holds out his hands; she comes to him*] I think I may tell him—may I not?—there is a great reward awaiting his return.

[CLARISSA *bows her head*]

CHARLES. If I succeed?

DISRAELI [*To* CLARISSA] Whether he succeed or fail, eh?

[*She sobbingly assents*]

Good! Now then. [*To* CHARLES] When shall you be ready to start? [*He goes to his chair behind the table and sits*]

CHARLES [*Enthusiastically*] I think I could start the day after to-morrow.

DISRAELI. Capital! That will make the undertaking so much more interesting.

CHARLES [*Innocently*] How do you mean, sir?

DISRAELI. Why, your friend, Foljambe, will have forty-eight hours' start with Ismail. [*He takes up a Continental Bradshaw and consults it*]

CHARLES. You mean I shall be too late?

DISRAELI. I am trying to convey that impression.

CHARLES. Well—to-morrow, then, if it must be!

DISRAELI. *That's* better!—but Foljambe can do a great deal in a day.

CHARLES. Well! [*Opening and looking at his watch*] —there's a night mail to-night at nine.

DISRAELI [*Closing* CHARLES'S *watch*] *Now!*

CHARLES [*Bewildered*] Now? You don't mean—?

DISRAELI. I mean in ten minutes.

CHARLES. But my luggage—! I shan't even have a clean collar!

DISRAELI. Damn your collar! [*Rapidly*] Catch the Dover Express from Charing Cross. You'll be in Marseilles to-morrow morning and in Cairo a day ahead of Foljambe—a day ahead!

CHARLES [*Striking the table*] By Jove, I'll do it!

DISRAELI [*Striking the table harder*] Of course you will! Now, children, say good-bye to each other, I'll write your instructions. [*He makes as if to write; he looks at the lovers who are standing overwhelmed with shyness, gets up, and exit through the door on the left*

CHARLES [*Coming quickly to* CLARISSA] Clarissa—did you hear what Mr. Disraeli said just now—the hope he held out of a reward?

CLARISSA. If he had not said it, I should have.

CHARLES [*Taking her hands in his*] The reward will be mine if I succeed?

CLARISSA. Or if you fail.

CHARLES. Clarissa! Do you love me then?

CLARISSA [*Earnestly*] I love you.

CHARLES. Ah! What courage you give me!

CLARISSA. I shall need courage, too! If anything happens to you, it will have been my doing.

CHARLES. If anything good happens to me, or I do anything good, that will have been your doing.

CLARISSA. Charles, is that true?

CHARLES. You know it is! Haven't you changed me already? You said I had made giant strides; who but you urged me on?

CLARISSA. And the stronger you grow, the weaker I become.

CHARLES [*Clasping her to him*] No, no!

CLARISSA [*Looking up into his face, with her head on his shoulder*] Oh, but I like it!

CHARLES [*With playful reproach*] A week ago you didn't love me.

CLARISSA. That wasn't you. That was the man who "adumbrated."

CHARLES [*Wincing*] Don't!

CLARISSA [*Laughing*] Such a beautiful word. But I know one more beautiful.

CHARLES. What?

CLARISSA. Hope!

[DISRAELI *enters with various papers*]

DISRAELI. Time's up!

CHARLES. Ready, sir.

DISRAELI. Here is all you need—money, instructions and [*Displaying a green paper*] a code for telegrams. I keep the duplicate. Now be off! [*As* CHARLES *turns to* CLARISSA] No, no—! Departures should be sudden. [*He takes* CHARLES's *arm and leads him to door down R.*] Good luck!

CHARLES. Good-bye!

CLARISSA [*Through her tears—bravely*] Good luck!

CHARLES [*Waving to her*] Good-bye!

[*Exit* CHARLES]

DISRAELI. Good luck! [*Stands at the door looking after him*] Ah—! [*He turns to* CLARISSA] Now!

CLARISSA [*Disconsolately*] What am I to do? What am I to do?

DISRAELI [*Thinking it over*] Come for a drive.

CLARISSA. Oh! You are heartless!—How long will it be before we hear from him?

DISRAELI. Three weeks.

CLARISSA. How am I to wait?

DISRAELI. How am *I* to wait?

CLARISSA. You! You don't love him.

DISRAELI. No?—Then why did I send him?—Listen. You shall come to Hughenden and we'll wait together.

CLARISSA. But three weeks! It's impossible!

DISRAELI [*With a sudden idea*] Do as I mean to.

CLARISSA [*Eagerly*] What?

DISRAELI. Come into the country and feed peacocks.

CLARISSA [*With great disgust*] Peacocks!

DISRAELI [*Linking his arm in hers and leading her out rapidly*] Very noble and intelligent birds, I assure you.

CURTAIN

ACT III

ACT III

At Hughenden.

Disraeli's study. A cosy oak-panelled room with large French windows, looking out on a bright garden. Over the mantelpiece are some silhouettes ; also a convex mirror. There is a large writing-table at right angles to the spectator ; in front of it is a revolving chair ; an ordinary chair is at the left corner of it. There is a sofa facing the spectator. A fender-seat in front of the fireplace. Around the walls are bookcases all built into the walls and filled with books. A fine autumn morning. The light in the room is soft and subdued ; outside it is brilliant. One door in the left corner, another in the right.

When the curtain rises, DISRAELI, *wearing an old soft hat, an old coat, old boots, and carrying a spade, is seen standing in the window throwing some seed which he takes out of the pocket of his coat to the peacocks, which, however, are not seen.*

DISRAELI [*Coming down, laughing*] No, no! No fighting! There's plenty for all of you!

[POTTER, *the old gardener, comes to the window*]

POTTER. Hey, master, wheer be going with that spade?

DISRAELI. Bless my soul!

POTTER. And them dirty boots!

DISRAELI [*Going up to* POTTER *and giving him the spade*] Splendid morning's work, eh, Potter?

POTTER. Don't blame me if you've caught your death.

DISRAELI [*Getting shoes out of cupboard*] Why?

POTTER. 'Tis well knowed you ought to be in your bed.

DISRAELI [*Hanging his old hat in the cupboard and taking out his shoes*] Why? I'm not ill.

POTTER. Yes, you are. Mortal bad you are. Sez so in print.

DISRAELI [*Amused*] Oh? Where? [*He sits and changes his shoes. He throws the old ones out in the centre of the floor*]

POTTER. I read it wi' my own eyes. Last night's *Globe*.

DISRAELI. A highly respectable sheet. What does it say?

POTTER. Fears you're werry unwell, and says Doctor Willums hev a-bin seed going in and out here. [*Remembering*] An' that be true, too—for Doctor Willums, he just drove by an' left this here bottle o' stuff for 'ee, sir.

[*Giving him a bottle of medicine*]

DISRAELI. Oh!—for Lady Beaconsfield. Very good of them to be so anxious. Doctor Williams has been here twice, to see Lady Beaconsfield; who had a fainting fit; and that's all. [*He places the bottle on the mantelpiece*]

POTTER. Them London newspapers!

[*Enter* BASCOT *from the right, with a tray, on which is a small coffee-pot, etc. An expression of dismay passes over his face as he notices the old boots on the floor. He looks hopelessly at* DISRAELI, *and goes on behind him to the upper end of the table*]

DISRAELI. Ah! my coffee! [*Sits at the table. Pleasantly*] Good morning, Bascot.

BASCOT [*Noticing* DISRAELI'S *coat with increased horror*] Good morning, sir!

DISRAELI. Is your mistress stirring?

BASCOT. I believe so, sir. [*Picks up the boots and takes them to the cupboard*]

DISRAELI. And Lady Clarissa?

BASCOT. Yes, sir.

POTTER [*Pointing off*] Here be Postman Flooks.

[BASCOT *takes* DISRAELI'S *black velvet coat out of the cupboard*]

DISRAELI. Good!

BASCOT [*Holding up the coat*] May I respectfully suggest—your coat, sir?

DISRAELI. Oh, but this is so comfortable!

BASCOT [*With a discreet cough*] Postman Flooks is coming, sir.

DISRAELI [*Smiles*] Quite right, Bascot; must keep up appearances. [*He changes his coat*]

[FLOOKS *comes on at the back from the left, tries to come in, but is prevented by* POTTER, *who points to his muddy boots*]

FLOOKS. Good morning, Mr. Disraeli.

DISRAELI [*Coming to his table*] Good morning, Mr. Flooks. Heavy bag this morning?

FLOOKS. Not so heavy as usual this morning, sir.

DISRAELI. Thank goodness!

[BASCOT *takes the bag from* FLOOKS *and hands it to* DISRAELI, *who unlocks it and pours out the letters*]

Thank you, Bascot. Wife pretty well, Mr. Flooks?

FLOOKS. Pretty middlin', sir.

DISRAELI. And the twins?

FLOOKS. Twins is allus healthy. Glad to see you're about so early! Heard you was poorly, sir!

POTTER [*At window*] There!

DISRAELI [*To* FLOOKS] What, you, too?

FLOOKS. Village was main upset about it, sir.

DISRAELI [*Sorting the letters*] Give the village my love, and say I'm quite well; and Lady Beaconsfield is quite well; and the swans are quite well—and the peacocks are extraordinarily well—eh, Potter?

POTTER [*Gruffly*] Ay, drat 'em!

FLOOKS. Thank you, sir. Good morning, sir.

[*Exit with* POTTER]

DISRAELI [*Handing* BASCOT *some letters*] Lady Beaconsfield—Lady Clarissa.

BASCOT. Thank you, sir.

[*Exit*]

[DISRAELI *sips his coffee and desultorily examines his letters*]

POTTER [*Appears at the window with two damaged sunflowers; he sighs heavily and comes in*] What her ladyship'll say, when she sees this, I don't know.

DISRAELI [*Reading*] Sees what?

POTTER. Why, these 'ere sunflowers she set such store by.

DISRAELI [*Still reading*] What's the matter with them?

POTTER. Ruination's the matter. Peacocks is the matter!

DISRAELI [*Turning round*] Peacocks again!

POTTER. 'Tis peacocks all the time!

[*Enter* CLARISSA *from the right, fresh as a dewy rosebud*]

DISRAELI. Ah, good morning, my dear! You come in the nick of time. Here is Potter scolding me on account of the poor peacocks.

POTTER [*Coming appealingly towards* CLARISSA] Mornin', your Ladyship. What I sez is, what's the use o' me and them lads toilin' and moilin' fit to bust to keep the place tidy, when they great ugly beastes is allowed to come squawkin' all over the place. . . . [*Turns to go*]

CLARISSA [*Laughing*] We all have our troubles, Mr. Potter.

POTTER [*Turning back quickly*] Maybe so; but they don't eat sunflowers—ugly toads!

[*Exit*]

CLARISSA [*Eagerly; at* DISRAELI'S *shoulder, alluding to the letters*] Any news?

DISRAELI [*Casually*] Not yet.

CLARISSA [*Coming away impatiently*] Not yet! Not yet! Not yet! It should have come days ago! Shouldn't it? Shouldn't it? . . .

DISRAELI. Well—

CLARISSA. And every day the cry has been, "Not yet!"

DISRAELI. Remember the task he has. Remember the difficulties.

CLARISSA. And the dangers.

DISRAELI. No, no. Forget the dangers. Have you breakfasted?

CLARISSA. Breakfasted! . . . As if I could breakfast! As soon as eight o'clock strikes I want to be here, to see the telegraph boy come. I want to watch your face as you read the message.

DISRAELI [*Wheeling his chair round to face her; whimsically*] Are you so deeply in love?

CLARISSA [*With a tragic sigh*] Unspeakably!

DISRAELI [*Drily*] Ah! I believe absence is a great element of charm.

CLARISSA [*As if she would like to shake him*] Oh, you—! Tell me the news will be good! Tell me so!

DISRAELI. I hope it will be good.

CLARISSA. No, no!

DISRAELI. I am sure it will be good.

CLARISSA. Ah! That's better. You know, it's quite dreadful to be as deeply in love as I am! Oh, I suppose that's a horrid thing to say. I'm sure mamma would think it horrid.

DISRAELI. I'm sure Charles would think it wasn't.

CLARISSA. The point of view does make a difference, doesn't it?

DISRAELI. Enormous! But why is it so dreadful to be in love?

CLARISSA [*Sits on the end of the sofa, facing* DISRAELI] It's disastrous. It takes all the conceit out of one; I used to think I was rather clever, and now I don't. I used to think—Oh! wasn't I a wretch?—I was

cleverer than Charles! But now—now, I see that even a stupid man—

DISRAELI. Hm'm!

CLARISSA. No, I do *not* mean Charles—! Can do all sorts of things a woman can't.

DISRAELI. Of course he can. He can whistle.

CLARISSA. Oh, so can I! [*And she does*]

DISRAELI. He can swear!

CLARISSA. So can I!

DISRAELI [*Shocked*] No!

CLARISSA. I do—often! But I could no more have gone to Cairo alone and faced Ismail—

DISRAELI. I'm quite sure poor Ismail would have collapsed at once, if you had.—By Jove, why didn't I think of that?

CLARISSA. But I'll tell you what I *would* do. If I knew Charles were in danger, I would go out alone and save him somehow; and if I knew he were ill, I would go out and nurse him, and bring him home.

DISRAELI [*Coming to her and taking her face in his hands*] And that is what very few men would do, my dear; and so you can think well of yourself again. But now, tell me: our little secret. [*She makes room for him. He sits beside her*]

CLARISSA. About Mrs. Travers?

DISRAELI. Yes. Have you kept what you know of that admirable lady to yourself?

CLARISSA. Yes.

DISRAELI. Haven't even told mamma?

CLARISSA [*With mock solemnity*] *Parole d'honneur!*

DISRAELI. Good. Have you heard from her?

CLARISSA. Not a sound. She is keeping very quiet.

DISRAELI [*Pensively*] Yes. I don't like people who keep quiet.

CLARISSA. Surely she can't do Charles any mischief?

DISRAELI. No. But should Charles have failed. . .

CLARISSA [*Indignantly*] He hasn't failed!

DISRAELI [*Quickly*] Of course he hasn't. [*Slight pause*] But *should* he have failed, she might do a great deal of mischief to the scheme.

CLARISSA [*Still more indignant*] Do you mean to say you will still carry out your scheme if Charles—?

DISRAELI [*Laying his hand on hers*] My dear, do you think the British Empire will collapse when I do? No! Charles and I are nothing; we are only oiling the wheels. But it's my duty to see that no dust gets into them, and so I have persuaded Mrs. Travers to come here—

CLARISSA [*Amazed*] Here—!

DISRAELI. And help you feed the peacocks.

CLARISSA. Here? Why?

DISRAELI. I want to have that ravishing creature where I can see her. [*He rises and moves towards the window*]

CLARISSA. But how did you persuade her?

DISRAELI [*Turning to her*] When the telegram from Charles failed to come, I threw out hints he had succeeded. She is perishing to know the truth. She leapt at Lady Beaconsfield's invitation. She is coming here to-day.

CLARISSA [*Laughing*] What a pity Hughenden has no dungeon!

DISRAELI. No, the garden is better. I couldn't see her in a dungeon.

[*Enter* LADY BEACONSFIELD *from the right. She is rather pale and frail looking. She brings an open letter.* CLARISSA *rises*]

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Cheerily*] Good morning, Dizzy!

DISRAELI [*Tenderly*] Mary Ann, my dear! Have you had a good night?

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Of course I have, Dizzy. Slept like a top.

DISRAELI. Sure?

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*To* CLARISSA] Now, Clarissa, listen to him! He doubts everybody's word. He doubts mine!

DISRAELI. I never can believe anything you say about yourself. [*To* CLARISSA *across* LADY BEACONSFIELD *taking* LADY BEACONSFIELD'S *left hand*] Do you know what this foolish woman did a little while ago? She drove to the House of Commons with me one night when I had to make a very important speech. The footman slammed the carriage door and crushed her finger in it—

CLARISSA [*With a cry*] Oh!

DISRAELI. Yes! This poor finger. And because she knew how distressed I should be, she never uttered a sound, but bore the agony unflinchingly—and I knew nothing about it till I got home. [*He kisses the finger*]

CLARISSA. Oh, how wonderful!

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Coming over to* CLARISSA] Nonsense! Wait till you're married, my dear. You'll be doing just as wonderful things all the time, and thinking just as little of them.

DISRAELI. Well, if you've spoken the truth, you shall have your morning's offering.

[*He goes into the garden*]

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Quickly*] Clarissa! Never allude to my health before Dizzy! Promise! It worries him; and Heaven knows he has worries enough, without that.

CLARISSA. Oh, but *is* anything the matter?

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Nothing—nothing to make a fuss about. Doctor Williams says I must be very careful. I am. So that's all right. Now, mind! Not a word to Dizzy!

CLARISSA. The crushed finger again?

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Yes! Gladly. Every day for his sake!

[*Re-enter* DISRAELI *from the garden, with a rose*]

DISRAELI. The last rose of summer. [*He hands it to* LADY BEACONSFIELD]

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Thank you, Dizzy. [*They kiss*] Now, you must attend to business.

[DISRAELI *sits at his desk,* LADY BEACONSFIELD *stands over him.* CLARISSA *goes to the window, meets* POTTER, *who gives her flowers and exit. She comes back, climbs on the fender-stool and arranges them in vases*]

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Alluding to the letter she had brought*] Lady Probert asks us to dine on Thursday week.

DISRAELI. Lady Probert? That's rather amusing! Sir Michael denounces me, and thunders against me, and—asks me to dinner!

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Shall I decline?

DISRAELI. Are you strong enough to go?

LADY BEACONSFIELD. You absurd man! I am strong enough to go anywhere. You are trying to make me out an old woman. Why, the Proberts' country place is only just outside our gates; it's not a three minutes' drive.

DISRAELI. Then make friends with the Mammon of unrighteousness, and accept.

[*Enter* BASCOT, *bearing a telegram on a salver*]

BASCOT. Telegram, sir!

CLARISSA [*Jumping off the fender-seat with a great cry*] Oh!

DISRAELI [*Calmly to* BASCOT] Thank you.

[*Pause, while* BASCOT *takes away the breakfast tray deliberately and exit*]

CLARISSA [*Impatiently*] Open it! Open it! Open it!

DISRAELI [*Opening the envelope*] Mary Ann—just look after that silly child while I read this telegram from my tailor.

[*He reads the telegram slowly, while the two women watch him intently. His face lights up with a great joy*]

Ah—!

CLARISSA [*Breaking away from* LADY BEACONSFIELD] For pity's sake!

DISRAELI. It *is* from Cairo.

CLARISSA [*Crossing to* DISRAELI; *eagerly*] What does he say?

[DISRAELI *hands her the telegram*]

CLARISSA [*Reads*] "The celery is ripe to dig." [*She looks up utterly bewildered*]

[DISRAELI, *laughing, opens the drawer of his writing-table and takes out a green paper code, like the one he gave* CHARLES *in* ACT II]

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Takes the telegram from* CLARISSA *and reads*] "The celery is ripe to dig." Well! I must say, I hardly think he need have gone to the expense of—

CLARISSA [*Realising that it is a code message, snatches the telegram from* LADY BEACONSFIELD *and turns to* DISRAELI] What does it *mean?*

DISRAELI [*Rising*] A great deal more than it says. Look.

CLARISSA. What's that?

DISRAELI. A copy of the code I gave him. Look!

[*The two women come close to him*]

"The celery is ripe to dig." The parallel sentence: "The Suez Canal purchase is completed and the cheque accepted."

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Dizzy!

DISRAELI [*With immense joy*] Yes!

CLARISSA. He has succeeded?

DISRAELI. Superbly!

CLARISSA [*Breaking into sobs*] Oh, thank God! Thank God! [*Sinks on sofa*]

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Turning to her*] Clarissa!

DISRAELI. Let her cry, my dear; it's worth it.

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*To* DISRAELI] How glad you must be!

DISRAELI. Glad!—For now that other dream of mine will be realised.

LADY BEACONSFIELD. What dream?

DISRAELI [*Inspired*] To make my sovereign Empress of India!

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Hushed*] Empress of India! . . .

DISRAELI. It sounds well, eh, Mary?—Mary, you shall be my messenger when the time is ripe. You, Lady Beaconsfield, shall carry the news to our belovèd Queen. And you shall be there, and you shall be proud, when I stand up to announce the new title to Her Majesty's Faithful Commons!

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Wistfully*] Yes!—Dizzy—when will that be?

DISRAELI. Oh! some time must elapse. [*Alluding to the telegram, which he lays, with the code, on the writing-table*] This must be formally ratified. Popular feeling must be created, the party educated.

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*More wistfully; sadly, but with a smile*] Make haste, Dizzy.

DISRAELI [*Laughing*] You impatient woman!

CLARISSA [*Recovering*] Will Charles come back soon, now?

DISRAELI. Another impatient woman! . . . I must telegraph this to Meyers. [*He sits at his table*]

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Yes! . . .

DISRAELI [*Writing*] He made it possible. [*With a whimsical glance over his shoulder*] Another Jew, Mary!—There'll be a peerage for him. How furious poor old Probert will be! [*He reads*] "Hugh Meyers, London Wall. The Suez Canal purchase is completed, and the cheque accepted."

[LADY BEACONSFIELD *goes up to the window to conceal her tears*]

CLARISSA [*Coming to him impatiently*] You have not answered my question. Will Charles come home soon?

DISRAELI [*Turning to her*] Yes! with trumpets blowing, drums beating, flags flying. . . .

CLARISSA. Oh! I don't care anything about that!

DISRAELI. And wedding bells ringing!

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*At the window, looking off*] A station cab! Can that be Mrs. Travers?

DISRAELI [*Suddenly arrested. Rising with the telegram he has been writing in his hand*] Mrs. Travers! We can't have Mrs. Travers here now! She'd worm this out of us in five minutes. She'd see it on all our faces.

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Laughing*] Oh, Dizzy! You made me invite her!

DISRAELI. Get rid of her. Send her away! Kill her! [*Laughing protest from the ladies*]

[*Enter* BASCOT *with a card on a salver*]

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Dizzy!

DISRAELI. Both of you. Set your wits to work. Tell her—tell her I'm very ill—very ill indeed! [*He reads the card*] [*Excitedly*] Hugh Meyers! It's Hugh Meyers! [*To* BASCOT] Show him in at once!

[*Exit* BASCOT]

That's splendid! Is it possible he has heard the news?

CLARISSA. Can Charles have cabled to him?

DISRAELI [*Humorously*] No! These financiers know everything by a sort of instinct. If he's come to tell us, don't spoil his effect; don't tell *him*. I'll

spring it on him. [*He flourishes the telegram and then places it on the table*]

[BASCOT *shows in* MR. MEYERS. *He is obviously in great mental distress;* DISRAELI *meets him;* BASCOT *exit*]

Good morning, Mr. Meyers. Delighted to see you! . . .

MEYERS [*Bowing to one and the other*] Good morning—er—good morning.

DISRAELI. What happy wind—?

MEYER. Can I have a few minutes in private with you, sir?

DISRAELI [*Implying that the ladies are acquainted with the circumstances*] Oh,—these ladies are—

MEYERS. Forgive me, if I insist.

DISRAELI [*Struck by his manner*] Why . . . of course . . . Mary . . .? [*Goes to the door on the right, and opens it*]

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*As she passes* MEYERS] You will stay to luncheon?

MEYERS. I am sorry that is impossible. Thank you very much.

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Also struck by his manner*] Come, Clarissa.

Exeunt LADY BEACONSFIELD *and* CLARISSA]

[MEYERS *comes towards the sofa*]

DISRAELI [*Heartily; coming over to the writing-table and picking up the telegram for an instant*] Mr. Meyers, I was just about to send you a telegram—

MEYERS [*Not to be turned from his subject*] One moment, sir. I want you to hear me first. What I have come to say—

DISRAELI [*Putting down the telegram, coming to him and looking at him keenly; then, noticing his agitated condition*] Oh? [*Quietly*] Well, sit down—sit down.

[MEYERS *drops mechanically on the end of the sofa.* DISRAELI *brings a chair from behind it and sits beside him*]

DISRAELI [*Gently*] Well?

MEYERS. I don't know how to tell you. It's so much harder than I expected. . . .

DISRAELI [*Gently*] Well—tell me—tell me.

MEYERS. I—I—Mr. Disraeli—I am as good as bankrupt.

DISRAELI. What?—I didn't catch—

MEYERS. My house is as good as bankrupt.

DISRAELI [*Stunned*] Bankrupt!—Meyers bankrupt!—Are you mad?

MEYERS. I wish to God I were!

DISRAELI. You mean you are temporarily pressed; you are in temporary difficulties. . . .

MEYERS. I mean what I say; I mean we are on the brink of bankruptcy.

DISRAELI. But—but! Oh! the thing is impossible!

MEYERS. It is the truth.

DISRAELI. But how?—A house like yours—an historical firm? Why, you might as well say the Bank of England—

MEYERS. So I should have thought—

DISRAELI [*Rising and standing over him. Angrily*] Why, what have you been doing?—what—

MEYERS. Stop! Stop!—It's not our fault—

DISRAELI [*Mastering himself*] Well. Explain. I am waiting—

MEYERS. Ah! I am still half in the dark myself. I told you the money was being sent from Petersburg —shipped from Kronstadt—

DISRAELI [*Impatiently*] Yes, yes.

MEYERS. I have been expecting it daily. I wrote—I telegraphed: Silence. To-day I received a letter from Oldenzaal.

DISRAELI [*Not catching the name*] Eh?

MEYERS. Oldenzaal; just inside the Dutch frontier. The ship—my bullion ship—the authorities at Kronstadt have not allowed it to sail.

DISRAELI. Why?

MEYERS. The authorities refuse to say why. They are full of polite regrets. They say they don't know why. It is detained pending enquiries; and the enquiries are postponed from day to day.

DISRAELI. Why were you not informed sooner?

MEYERS. The captain and crew were under observation—were not allowed to write or telegraph. The news came in a letter, hurriedly written in pencil on the margin of a newspaper, and sent by the intermediary of a commercial traveller.

DISRAELI. Well?

MEYERS. I had hoped the Bank of England would have given me credit for the two millions until the arrival of the ship. But rumours have been set afloat here affecting my solvency. The Bank is acting in perfect good faith. It *cannot* negotiate my paper. And so my back is broken.

DISRAELI [*An exclamation of anger*] Ah!

MEYERS. Ah! be as angry as you like. You are justified. I have been an honest man all my life

and now I stand before you in the light of a common cheat. [*Breaks down, bowing his head*]

DISRAELI [*Coming slowly to him and offering his hand*] Mr. Meyers. I *know* you, sir!

[MEYERS *grasps his hand, but cannot speak*]

Now, tell me: can you guess by whom the rumours have been started?

MEYERS [*Pulling himself together*] Not directly. Of course some hostile influence is at work.

DISRAELI [*Remembering* MRS. TRAVERS] Ah—! Is your position commonly known?

MEYERS. Not yet.

[DISRAELI *moves away towards his writing-table*]

I have come straight to you, because of course we cannot carry out the Canal contract. [DISRAELI *suddenly realises the horror of the situation*] Thank Heaven I am in time. Thank Heaven that has not gone through.

[DISRAELI *picks up the telegram he was about to send to* MEYERS *and holds it out to him.* MEYERS *takes it, looking inquiringly at* DISRAELI; *reads it, and then stands horror-stricken*]

Good God!

[DISRAELI *sinks into his chair. A pause*]

DISRAELI [*Voiceless*] When will it be known, Meyers? When will it be known?

MEYERS [*With a gesture of despair. Voiceless*] To-night. To-morrow morning.

DISRAELI [*Breaking out and leaping up*] By the Lord it shall not!

[*He turns to* MEYERS]

Get back to town! Quickly! Get to your office. Stay there! Stay there! I must know you are there! Don't budge, if I keep you there all night.

MEYERS. But—!

DISRAELI. And don't breathe a word! Don't let anyone else. Don't give the slightest hint of anything unusual. Watch your words; watch your looks. Something may happen.

MEYERS [*With a touch of hope*] What, sir?—what?

DISRAELI [*Staring in front of him*] God knows!—God knows!

[*He mutely motions* MEYERS *to go;* MEYERS *exit*]

[DISRAELI *stands dazed. He goes up to the window and takes a deep draught of air; then unsteadily makes his way to the door on the right, which he thrusts open; He calls*]

Mary Ann!—Mary Ann! [*He comes back towards his writing-table*]

[*Enter* LADY BEACONSFIELD]

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Yes, dear?

DISRAELI [*Voiceless*] Shut the door, Mary.

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Does so, then comes down to him anxiously*] What is it?

DISRAELI [*Clasping her to him*] Mary, you have stood by me in many horrible predicaments. I am in the worst I was ever in.

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Dizzy!—Meyers?

DISRAELI. Meyers is bankrupt!

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Quite simply*] Does that mean we are poor?

DISRAELI. No, no! [*Crying out in despair*] Oh! If that were all!

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Then—— ?

DISRAELI. Meyers was finding the money for the Canal—

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Ah!

DISRAELI. Wait!—Deeford has payed over the cheque. Now Meyers has failed—and we cannot meet it.

LADY BEACONSFIELD. And you?

DISRAELI [*Amazed*] I—?

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Simply*] Yes, dear. I want to know how this will affect you.

DISRAELI. What does that matter?

LADY BEACONSFIELD. It's all that matters to me.

DISRAELI. I haven't thought of it. What will happen to me? Disgrace, utter and irretrievable; the kind of disgrace no man can bear—no man can live through.

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Gently putting her hand on his arm*] Dizzy!

DISRAELI. Yes! By Heavens, I will bear it! I'll face the nation. I'll bear it—alone!

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Laying her hand on his arm tenderly*] Not alone, dear.

DISRAELI [*Breaking down, sinks into his chair and buries his head in her arm*] Thank God for you, Mary! Thank God for you!

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Mastering her tears*] Have you done anything yet?

DISRAELI [*Helplessly*] So soon? What could I do?

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*With assumed cheerfulness*] Shouldn't we go up to town?

DISRAELI. I can't. I dare not. I cannot move secretly. The Prime Minister cannot stir without

setting the whole world agog. The papers have said I am ill. If I were seen in Downing Street now, in the recess, when I am supposed to be ill, every newspaper in the world would grow hysterical. It's horrible, Mary. I am tied, hand and foot.

[*Enter* BASCOT]

BASCOT [*Announcing*] Mrs. Travers.

DISRAELI [*Almost with a shout, and leaping to his feet*] What?

BASCOT. Mrs. Travers, in a station cab, sir.

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Hurriedly*] I'll get rid of her!

DISRAELI [*Turning on her*] Get rid of her?—[*To* BASCOT] Ask her to wait, and show her in when I ring!

[*Exit* BASCOT]

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Surely you'll not receive her now!

DISRAELI. Yes!

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Why?

DISRAELI. I want to see her. I want to see that charming face of hers. I want to know— [*He goes quickly to cupboard, and puts his dressing-gown on over his coat*]

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Amazed*] Dizzy!—What is this play-acting?

DISRAELI [*Grimly*] I am ill. Very ill. The papers say I'm ill. She shall see the sickest man she ever saw in her life!

[*Enter* CLARISSA]

CLARISSA [*Excitedly*] Mrs. Travers has driven up. Shall I send her away?

DISRAELI. No, no, no! Chain her—[*Rings*] hand and foot! [*He throws himself on the sofa*]

CLARISSA [*Astonished*] But, Mr. Disraeli—!

DISRAELI. Hush! I'm ill. [*Suddenly his eye rests on the medicine bottle on the mantelpiece; he realises the value of it as a piece of* mise en scène; *hr leaps up, snatches the bottle, and places it on a small table at the head of the sofa; then throws himself back on the sofa*] I am *very* ill!

[CLARISSA *stands watching in utter bewilderment*]

[*Enter* MRS. TRAVERS. *She is more ravishing than ever*]

MRS. TRAVERS [*Comes forward gushingly to* LADY BEACONSFIELD] Ah—! Dear Lady Beaconsfield—

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Puts her finger to her lips*] Sh—!

MRS. TRAVERS [*Seeing* DISRAELI; *hushed*] Oh!—I'm so sorry! I *heard* Mr. Disraeli was ill. I did not know whether to come or not. I am quite sure you cannot want me. [*Makes as if to withdraw*]

DISRAELI [*In a weak voice*] Is that Mrs. Travers, dear?

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Yes, dear.

DISRAELI [*Feebly*] Oh, ho—ho—ho—ho—ho!

MRS. TRAVERS. I had no idea it was so serious. I won't stay a moment—

DISRAELI [*Rising a little and holding out a weak and wavering hand*] Sweet Mrs. Travers! So good of you. I'm very weak—very weak.

MRS. TRAVERS [*Puts her lace scarf on the table and comes over behind the sofa to him, taking his hand in a great show of sympathy*] I'm so sorry. What is the matter?

DISRAELI. I'm very weak. Very weak. But very glad to see you. So bright. So young. So—How is your husband?

MRS. TRAVERS [*Behind the sofa, holding his hand*] How good of you to ask!—He's at Marienbad.

DISRAELI. And you've come to see the sick man. [*Feebly turns to* LADY BEACONSFIELD] Isn't it good of her, Mary! [*To* MRS. TRAVERS] Do sit down!—there—where I can see you!

[*Indicates his chair at the writing-table*]

MRS. TRAVERS [*On her way to the chair turns to* CLARISSA] Sweet Clarissa—! More beautiful every day!—I saw the dear Duchess, your mother, yesterday. She is so very anxious about Lord Deeford. He's abroad, isn't he? Egypt, or somewhere?

[CLARISSA *nervously turns to* DISRAELI *who nods assent*]

CLARISSA. Yes, he is abroad.

DISRAELI. Yes, he is in Egypt.

[CLARISSA *and* LADY BEACONSFIELD *exchange a glance of surprise*]

MRS. TRAVERS. I do hope he's not too venturesome. Cairo is such a dreadful place. Those Orientals, you know; one can never trust them—

DISRAELI. No!

MRS. TRAVERS. So sly!

DISRAELI. Terrible!

MRS. TRAVERS. So deceitful.

DISRAELI. Ah!

[CLARISSA, *whom this distresses, goes to* LADY BEACONSFIELD]

Dear, sympathetic creature! Isn't she sympathetic, Mary? But don't be uneasy. We have just heard from Deeford. [*Lies down utterly exhausted*]

MRS. TRAVERS [*With difficulty suppressing her curiosity*] Indeed?

DISRAELI [*In the voice of a dying man*] Mary, isn't it time for my beef tea?

[*This is almost too much for* LADY BEACONSFIELD *and* CLARISSA, *who have the greatest difficulty in keeping their countenances*]

MRS. TRAVERS [*After an impatient pause*] You say you have heard?

DISRAELI [*Who had apparently forgotten her existence*] Oh, Mrs. Travers—from Deeford? Yes, we had a telegram. Where is that telegram? Help me up, Mary.

[LADY BEACONSFIELD *helpd him*]

Ah!—[*Pointing*] There, on the table. Read it for yourself, Mrs. Travers.

[MRS. TRAVERS *picks up and reads the telegram.* DISRAELI *stands feebly, facing the mirror over the fireplace*]

[*Looking into the mirror*] Heavens! How pale I am!

MRS. TRAVERS [*Reading*] "The celery is ripe to dig." [*To* CLARISSA] How odd?

CLARISSA [*Forced to say something*] Yes.

DISRAELI [*Looking into mirror*] Why odd?

MRS. TRAVERS [*Smiling and putting down the telegram*] That anyone should cable all the way from Egypt about celery. [*She sees the green code. She looks at it keenly; her eyes flash, and as apparently no one is watching, she gradually draws it towards her*]

DISRAELI [*Watching her in the mirror*] Oh, you know he's engaged on a very interesting agricultural experiment. You remember the discussion we were having at Glastonbury Towers on this very subject.

MRS. TRAVERS [*Crumpling the code in her hand*] Oh yes!—Glastonbury Towers! Such a delightful party. And all dispersed. Lord Deeford in Egypt —poor Mr. Disraeli very ill—Sir Michael Probert out of town—

DISRAELI [*With a start, which he suppresses*] Probert!

MRS. TRAVERS [*Rising quickly and slipping the code into the glove of her right hand. Astonished*] I beg your pardon? [*She looks about for a way of escape, to read the code*]

DISRAELI [*Blandly*] A twinge. It takes me like that. You reminded me of a very trying interview with Probert.

CLARISSA [*To* MRS. TRAVERS, *who is fidgeting*] What's the matter, Mrs. Travers?

MRS. TRAVERS [*Edging up to the window*] Isn't this room very close?

DISRAELI [*To* LADY BEACONSFIELD] Don't let her slip!

MRS. TRAVERS [*Looking out of the window*] Oh!—Is that one of the famous peacocks?

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Intercepting her near the window*] Dizzy's very proud of them, and of the swans.

MRS. TRAVERS. I've heard so much about them. May I go and look at them?

[LADY BEACONSFIELD *takes her right arm in her own left arm and gently endeavours to detain her*]

DISRAELI [*Beckoning to* CLARISSA, *who comes down to him quickly*] She has the code! Don't let her read it yet. Follow her! Stick to her!

[CLARISSA *goes up to* MRS. TRAVERS, *taking her left arm in her right*]

CLARISSA. I'll show you their houses.

MRS. TRAVERS [*Viciously*] Oh, don't trouble—

[*She and* CLARISSA *go out arm-in-arm*]

DISRAELI [*Hurriedly crossing to the writing-table, takes out a sheet of paper and writes. To* LADY BEACONSFIELD] Mary, I want you to fetch Probert at once.

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Going towards the bell-push*] I'll order the carriage!

DISRAELI. Wait. Is Mrs. Traver's cab still there?

LADY BEACONSFIELD. I'll see. [*She goes to window and looks off*] Yes, dear. [*Comes down to the table above* DISRAELI]

DISRAELI. Well, take that.

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Oh!—but if Sir Michael refuses to come!

DISRAELI [*Still writing*] Say it's a matter of life and death.

LADY BEACONSFIELD. But—Mrs. Travers—?

DISRAELI. *I'll* look after her. Mary, take Clarissa with you. I want that woman alone!

[*Alluding to the paper*] This must be signed—this must be signed.

[MRS. TRAVERS *and* CLARISSA *are heard returning from the garden ;* DISRAELI *quickly goes back to the sofa and sits. Re-enter* MRS. TRAVERS *and* CLARISSA, *who has obviously never let go her hold.* MRS. TRAVERS *disengages herself from* CLARISSA *as they come into the room*]

MRS. TRAVERS [*Snappishly*] They are beautiful! And so tame.

[CLARISSA *exchanges a glance with* DISRAELI *and shakes her head negatively :* MRS. TRAVERS *has not read the code*]

DISRAELI. So glad you like them. [*Indicating the sofa*] Come and sit down.

MRS. TRAVERS [*Fidgety*] I ought really to be going—

DISRAELI. No, no. Sit down. Lady Beaconsfield and Clarissa have to go to the station to meet the specialist.

[CLARISSA, *more puzzled than ever, is about to speak, but* LADY BEACONSFIELD *motions her to silence*]

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Come, Clarissa. [*To* MRS. TRAVERS] We shall only be gone a very few minutes.

[*Exeunt* LADY BEACONSFIELD *and* CLARISSA]

MRS. TRAVERS. A specialist ? Are you so ill ?

DISRAELI. Yes; but he'll cure me. *He'll* cure me. Now, you must stay and nurse the poor sick man.

MRS. TRAVERS [*Coming towards him*] I'm so dreadfully sorry, but—

[DISRAELI *takes her right hand, and draws her down beside him*]

DISRAELI. No, no. You must stay till they come back.

MRS. TRAVERS. Indeed no! My cab is waiting.

DISRAELI. No. Lady Beaconsfield has taken that.

MRS. TRAVERS [*Indignant*] Really!

DISRAELI. Ah, don't be angry—[*Fondling her hand*] The dainty hand—

MRS. TRAVERS [*Smiling, but not quite sure of herself*] Please—

DISRAELI [*Toying with it*] The supple fingers—so long and thin—so exquisitely shaped—

MRS. TRAVERS [*Protesting coquettishly*] Mr. Disraeli—!

DISRAELI. So quick to grasp things—unconsidered trifles—scraps of paper!

MRS. TRAVERS [*Frightened*] Let me go! You are hurting!

DISRAELI [*Holding her tight*] In such a hurry to get away from the poor sick man—to get away—and read—[*He takes the code out of her glove and holds it up*] the code?

MRS. TRAVERS [*Facing him; at bay*] Well? What of it?

DISRAELI. Ah, that's better. That's how I remember you.

MRS. TRAVERS. Remember me?

DISRAELI. Yes. When we met at the Towers—so curious—I remembered you, but I couldn't place

you. I connected you with something blue and white—

Mrs. Travers [*With fear in her eyes, but a laugh on her lips*] Milk and water?

Disraeli. No! Snow and water. Mont Blanc and the Lake of Geneva.

[Mrs. Travers *starts*]

Geneva in the 'sixties. Political refugees and their English sympathisers. A man called Lumley, and his ravishing—shall I say—wife?

[*She looks at him quickly*]

No—Comrade was their word. Charming relationship. That delightful couple—so good to the unhappy exiles! But people are cruel. They said kind Mr. Lumley and his lovely—comrade—were agents,—decoys engaged in worming out the secrets of the refugees, in tempting them back to prison—to death.

[Mrs. Travers's *face has assumed an expression of horror at the memory of the past. A stifled cry escapes her lips, but she recovers herself and smilingly turns to* Disraeli]

Mrs. Travers. And pray what has all this to do with me?

Disraeli. Ah, what indeed? You, the friend of Duchesses—of Dukes. Good Mr. Lumley and his charming comrade were driven out of Geneva by the slanderers; and where do you think I saw him next? In Downing Street. He had added Foljambe to his name. I was so very sorry for him I gave him work. But you did better. You gave him instructions to hurry to Trieste. [*With the ring on his finger, he raps*

on the table, reminding her of her signal to FOLJAMBE *in* Act II] Now do I remember you, dear Mrs. Lumley-Foljambe-Travers?

MRS. TRAVERS [*Calmly*] And—what next?

DISRAELI. Admiration. Profound admiration till this moment. To-day you have disappointed me. [*Holding up the code*] Why steal this? Weak; very weak. You had only to ask me, and I would have told you. "The celery is ripe to dig," means "The Suez Canal purchase is completed and the cheque accepted." Poor dear Lumley has had all that tiresome journey for nothing.

MRS. TRAVERS [*Laughing triumphantly*] I congratulate you. Your apple-faced boy has blundered into success—

DISRAELI. That's all any of us do.

MRS. TRAVERS. Into a success that will cost you dear.

DISRAELI [*Wearily*] That's the sort of thing Gladstone will say.

MRS. TRAVERS [*Triumphantly*] It's what the world will say when it knows Meyers is bankrupt.

DISRAELI [*Pretending amazement*] When it knows what?

MRS. TRAVERS [*Leaning over him and repeating it sweetly, but with fiendish delight*] Meyers is bankrupt—bankrupt—bankrupt—!

DISRAELI [*Weakly*] Mrs. Travers—I am very ill—don't—don't jest with me.

MRS. TRAVERS. Meyers is bankrupt; and his cheque waste paper.

DISRAELI [*Dazed*] Wait—wait—let me gather my wits. Ah, it's easy enough for you to say so, but why should I believe you?

MRS. TRAVERS. Because it was my invention. *I* caused his ship to be detained. *I* undermined his credit! You thought to circumvent me with your apple-faced boy? What do you say now?

DISRAELI. You can't expect me to say much. I—I am a child in your hands.

[*Enter* LADY BEACONSFIELD, SIR MICHAEL PROBERT *and* CLARISSA]

LADY BEACONSFIELD. Here is Sir Michael, Dizzy.

PROBERT [*Fussily*] Now, Mr. Disraeli, I am very sorry to hear you are ill.

[PROBERT *comes to* DISRAELI, *shakes hands with him.* CLARISSA *sits on the fender-seat.* LADY BEACONSFIELD *stands beside her*]

DISRAELI [*Rising*] I am so much better. Mrs. Traver's stimulating company—

MRS. TRAVERS [*Astonished*] Sir Michael Probert?

PROBERT [*Surprised at seeing her*] How do you do?

MRS. TRAVERS. But he's not—

DISRAELI [*Taking off his dressing-gown and throwing it on the sofa*] A specialist? Oh, yes, he is.

PROBERT [*Surprised and a little offended*] What's going on? If you are not ill, why have you sent for me?

DISRAELI. Sit down, Probert.

[PROBERT *sits*]

I want to tell you a little story.

[*Intercepting* MRS. TRAVERS, *who starts to go*]

No, don't go, Mrs. Travers; this will interest you.

[*She sits on the left of the writing-table. Her face reflects every emotion called up by the ensuing scene*]

PROBERT. I repeat. Why have you sent for me?

DISRAELI. I told you I might send for you.

PROBERT. When? What do you mean?

DISRAELI. When we had that delightful interview at Glastonbury Towers.

PROBERT. Ha! I thought as much. Your hare-brained scheme. Moses has failed you, and you had to give it up. Well, it's no use appealing to me.

DISRAELI. Moses has not failed me. I have carried the scheme through.

PROBERT. What? Do you mean to tell me you have purchased the Suez Canal?

DISRAELI. If there is one thing on which I pride myself, it is my consistency. The power and the glory of my country were at stake. I had to act quickly, and I had to act on my own responsibility.

PROBERT [*Sternly*] Then let me tell you, sir, you have committed a crime.

DISRAELI. As Parliament was not sitting to vote the money, I had to seek it elsewhere. Four millions sterling. You refused.

PROBERT. I did, and I am proud of it.

DISRAELI. So I went to the wealthiest private firm—to Hugh Meyers.

PROBERT. Ha! A Jew!

DISRAELI [*Taking no notice of the affront*] Meyers not being a party man but a patriot, saw the greatness of the idea and stood by me. I sent Deeford to Ismail. Spies had got wind of what I was doing,

[MRS. TRAVERS *is triumphant*]

so Deeford had to go in a hurry: a race for an Empire! He has succeeded. Understand me, I deliberately put the matter in the simplest terms. Deeford has bought the Canal and has paid for it with Meyer's cheque drawn on the Bank of England.

[PROBERT *starts*]

Wait! Meanwhile Russia has been at work by the intermediary [*He bows to* MRS. TRAVERS. *She smilingly returns his bow*] of one of the most fascinating women of my acquaintance. Meyers is bankrupt.

[*Movement of triumph from* MRS. TRAVERS]

PROBERT. What?

DISRAELI. He has been ruined.

PROBERT. Mr. Disraeli, I warned you of this. I foresaw it. Your high-handed action has landed you just where I said it would. You must get out of it as best you can. It is no use appealing to me. [*He rises*]

DISRAELI [*With a total change of manner*] No? then I will not appeal. I will command!

PROBERT. What?

DISRAELI [*Going to his table and displaying the paper he had prepared*] You will sign this note giving Meyers unlimited credit—

[MRS. TRAVERS *is attentive*]

PROBERT. I? Are you mad?

DISRAELI. I was never so sane in my life. Meyers's position is saved if he can gain time. The Bank of England must give him unlimited credit—today; now.

[MRS. TRAVERS *watches* PROBERT *intently*]

PROBERT. You don't know what you are saying. You don't know to whom you are speaking. I refuse.

DISRAELI. You can't.

PROBERT. I refuse emphatically. You have mistaken your man. I am an Englishman; the head of a great National institution. I am not to be ordered about by an—by an alien Jew.

[LADY BEACONSFIELD *starts angrily.* CLARISSA *catches her hand and soothes her*]

DISRAELI. Ah, but the alien Jew happens to be the better citizen; moreover, he happens to be Prime Minister.

PROBERT. Do you threaten me?

DISRAELI. Yes, if you force me to.

PROBERT. Empty threats.

DISRAELI. Do you think so? You say the Bank is a National institution. What becomes of that title if it refuses to save the nation?—What becomes of you?

PROBERT. Mr. Disraeli—!

DISRAELI. When it is known that the lack of patriotism of one man has placed our country in the position of a person who is trying to pass a fraudulent cheque, exposed the nation to the ridicule of the world, lost the Canal, lost India, baffled England, beaten her, disgraced her, dragged her through the mud—what becomes of the Bank?

PROBERT. You cannot touch the Bank!

DISRAELI. I'll smash the Bank!

[MRS. TRAVERS *and* CLARISSA *spring to their feet*]

Parliament granted the Bank its charter; Parliament can withdraw it.

PROBERT. Good God!

DISRAELI. And shall withdraw it at my bidding! I am Prime Minister! I can do this, and if you don't sign, by God, I will! [*He points imperiously to the paper*] Now!

PROBERT [*After some hesitation, crosses to table and signs*] There! [*At the door*] It is monstrous that a man like you should have such power!

[*Exit*]

[DISRAELI *very courteously hands* MRS. TRAVERS *her lace scarf, across the table. She takes it, and slowly goes to the door; then, turning, she smiles at him; nods her head pleasantly, and exit.* DISRAELI *comes towards* LADY BEACONSFIELD]

CLARISSA [*Clapping her hands with a girlish outburst*] Oh, Mr. Disraeli, thank God you have such power.

DISRAELI [*Slipping one arm through* LADY BEACONSFIELD'S *and the other through* CLARISSA'S; *whimsically*] My dear child, I haven't. But he doesn't know that.

[*As they turn laughing to go into the garden*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT IV

ACT IV

At the Foreign Office

The ante-room, seen diagonally. On the left is a great arch curtained off. Opposite, on the right, is a similar door. A string-band is playing waltzes by Strauss and Gungl in the distance. The room is crowded with a brilliant throng. Diplomats; naval and military officers (English and foreign) all in full uniform or in Court dress. Many ladies. The men blaze with orders; the women with diamonds. The powdered menservants are in gala livery. All the people we know, with the exception of Lady Beaconsfield *and* Mrs. Travers, *are present. All move about; stream in and out through the arch at the back. There is the hubbub of animated talk and laughter.*

[*Scraps of conversation emerge from the general talk*]

Duke. What a day this has been for Dizzy! Eh, Belinda?

Duchess. I always said he would do something very astonishing.

Duke. I wish you had seen how he swayed the House just now, when he announced the Queen's new title.

Duchess. Empress of India—! Ah! He's a great man!

DUKE. What? You've come round to that, have you?

DUCHESS. The dear Queen is coming here, to-night. What more is there to say? [*Anxiously*] Is there any news of dear Lady Beaconsfield?

DUKE. Beyond that she's very ill I've heard nothing; daren't ask Dizzy.

[SIR MICHAEL PROBERT *meets* MEYERS, *and shakes hands patronisingly*]

PROBERT. Well, Meyers? On your legs again?

MEYERS [*Modest as ever*] Thanks to you, Sir Michael.

PROBERT [*Booms*] Yes, yes; great patriotic idea, you know. Dizzy and I talked it over long before you came into it.

MEYERS [*Simply*] So he told me.

PROBERT. Oh, yes! And the Bank, as a great patriotic institution, couldn't let it drop.

MEYERS [*With a twinkle*] How fortunate you saw it in that light.

PROBERT [*Impervious to irony*] Oh! Glad to help you! Glad to help you!

[CLARISSA *has come in on the arm of a young officer, who has obviously bored her to death. She gives him his congé and comes to* MEYERS]

CLARISSA [*Abruptly, to* MEYERS] *Have* you seen Charles?

MEYERS. Ah, Lady Clarissa! So Viscount Deeford has come home?

CLARISSA. Yes, but think of it—I have not been allowed to see him yet!

MEYERS. Too bad! Too bad! Why not?

CLARISSA. Why, he arrived only an hour ago, and as soon as he had changed, he had to go straight to Downing Street.

MEYERS. Naturally.

CLARISSA. I believe he's closeted with Mr. Disraeli at this moment.

[CHARLES *appears in the doorway on the right*]

MEYERS [*Pointing to him*] Look!

CLARISSA [*Almost voiceless*] Charles!

[*They rush at each other, but are kept within bounds by the presence of the other people in the room, many of whom, to* CHARLES'S *disgust, insist on shaking hands with him*]

CHARLES [*He would give a king's ransom to fold her in his arms, but can't*] Oh—Hang all these people!—er—[*Very formally*] How do you do?

CLARISSA [*Demurely*] Very well, thank you.

DUCHESS [*Sailing down on them*] Dear Charles!—I am so very glad.

[*Shakes hands with him*]

LADY CUDWORTH [*Coming to him*] Oh, how brown you are!

LADY BROOKE [*Similarly*] Quite a different man!

CHARLES [*Laughing*] No. The same man; but I've *seen* things.

LORD CUDWORTH [*Crowding in*] I say, old fellah—so glad.

CHARLES [*Shaking hands*] How are you, Dolly? [*He tries to get to* CLARISSA] Clarissa—

LORD CUDWORTH [*Seizing his arm*] I say, you know—

LADY CUDWORTH [*Seeing what is the matter, takes* CUDWORTH'S *arm*] Sh! Come away.

CUDWORTH [*Injured*] Well, but I was goin' to say—

LADY CUDWORTH *takes him out*]

[*The* DUKE *and the* DUCHESS *go out*]

CHARLES. Clar—

BROOKE [*Coming to him*] Hulloa, Deeford! So glad!

CHARLES [*Nearly out of patience*] H'are you, Brookie?— Clarissa—

BROOKE. I say, you know—

CHARLES [*Turns on him ferociously*] Well! What?

LADY BROOKE [*Seizing her husband*] Come along, do!

BROOKE [*To* CHARLES] Oh—er—nothing.

[*He and his wife go out*]

[*All are off except* MEYERS *and* PROBERT]

CHARLES. Clarissa—

CLARISSA [*Looking at* MEYERS *and stamping her foot prettily*] Oh—what shall I do?

MEYERS [*With charming indulgence*] My dear young lady, do whatever comes natural.

[*He whispers to* PROBERT]

PROBERT. Eh? What? God bless my soul!

[*He and* MEYERS *go out. But the room is never quite empty*]

CLARISSA [*Almost before they are out of the room*] Ah!—

CHARLES. This time the "Ah" is for *me!*

CLARISSA. What *do* you mean?

CHARLES. Don't you remember how I asked you to marry me, and you turned and rent me, and Dizzy came into the room and you said "Ah," and I was furious?

CLARISSA. I only remember how I've longed to say "Ah" again!

CHARLES. He separated us then; he's brought us together again. He sent me to you, Clarissa. He said I should find you here.

CLARISSA. That's the best thing he ever said in his life. Oh, let me look at you! You're alive! Are you sure? You haven't been stabbed, or poisoned, or —or anything?

CHARLES. I'm ashamed to say, not a thing's happened to me.

CLARISSA. Except that you've done wonders.

CHARLES [*Laughing*] If giving a rather oily old gentleman four million pounds which didn't belong to me was a wonder. But this is the greatest wonder.

[*Seeing that for the moment there is actually no one in sight he snatches a hasty kiss*]

CLARISSA [*Looking round alarmed*] Oh, Charles! The people! [*And, sure enough, the room begins to fill again*]

CHARLES. Oh, Clarissa! I don't care!

CLARISSA. Nor I, either. But now we *must* be proper.

CHARLES. Hang propriety!

CLARISSA. *You* say that! How splendid!

CHARLES. Tell me: what have you been doing all this time?

CLARISSA [*With great importance*] I've been reading Herbert Spencer and Ruskin.

CHARLES [*With genuine sympathy*] Oh, poor darling!

CLARISSA. If you suffered, why shouldn't I?

CHARLES. By Jove, you've had the worst of it, though.

CLARISSA. Tell me all about it—all your adventures.

CHARLES. None to tell. Except that when it was all done I met our old friend, Foljambe—

CLARISSA. Was he furious?

CHARLES. N-no. Quite pleasant. Only the poor devil didn't quite know what to do, or where to go.

CLARISSA. There's always Carlsbad.

CHARLES. Or—Kissingen.

[*He tries to kiss her. But the* DUCHESS *looms upon them*]

DUCHESS. Clarissa! Your back?

CLARISSA [*Demurely*] Yes, mamma.

[*Enter* LORD BROOKE *and* LORD CUDWORTH *talking together.* LADY BROOKE *and* LADY CUDWORTH *enter and come down on either side*]

[*Gradually all the characters re-enter*]

LADY BROOKE *and* LADY CUDWORTH [*Together*] Is it true the Queen's coming here to-night?

BROOKE *and* CUDWORTH [*Together*] Don't know, I'm sure.

[*They turn away and the two women meet*]

LADY BROOKE. Don't you wish our husbands had more conversation?

LADY CUDWORTH. They have so little so say that the less they talk about it, the better.

MEYERS [*To* CLARISSA, *anxiously*] They say Lady Beaconsfield is ill—

CLARISSA. Mr. Meyers, I am dreadfully anxious—

MEYERS. Why? Is she seriously ill?

CLARISSA. I don't know; I don't know. And I daren't mention it to Mr. Disraeli. Her absence to-night is such a horrible disappointment for him.

PROBERT [*Joining them and booming genially*] It's nothing to be frightened about. I have—ah—special information. Doctor Williams. Saw him a few days ago. Nothing unusual. Fainting fits.

[*The crowd have gathered about the entrance on the right, looking off expectantly*]

[DISRAELI *is approaching, and as they fall back to make way for him several are heard saying: "Mr. Disraeli is coming. Ah . . . Mr. Disraeli . . . Disraeli," etc., etc.*]

PROBERT [*Looking towards entrance*] Ah! Warwick, the Kingmaker!

MEYERS [*Quietly*] Better than that. Benjamin Disraeli—the Jew—Empress-maker!

[*At this moment* DISRAELI *comes in through the doors on the right. He is in ministerial dress. He is a little greyer than before. He walks with his hands behind his back; his head slightly bent, as if oblivious of his surroundings. The crowd make way for him*]

DUCHESS [*Going to him*] *Dear* Mr. Disraeli—!

DISRAELI [*Absent-mindedly*] Duchess—charmed—charmed—

[*He tries to pass on*]

DUCHESS. So very sorry dearest Lady Beaconsfield cannot be here to-night!

DISRAELI [*Wincing*] So is she—and so am I—so am I.

[*The* DUKE *and* CLARISSA *exchange glances and endeavour to attract the* DUCHESS's *attention*]

DUCHESS. But I'm sure it is only a passing indisposition.

DISRAELI. I trust so. I trust so.

[*He gets away;* CLARISSA *comes quickly to him*]

[*In a tone of deep affection*] Dear child.

CLARISSA [*Quietly; anxiously*] How is she, really?

DISRAELI. Don't ask me! I cannot trust myself to speak. I am horribly anxious. Doctor Williams reassured me, or I should not be here—not even to meet the Empress of India.

[*There is a loud buzz of conversation, and the people begin to move about*]

DISRAELI [*Addressing the assembly*] Her Majesty is on her way—

[*Presently the* DUKE *notices that* DISRAELI *is speaking; he signals silence to the others and the conversation gradually dies down*]

[DISRAELI *bows his head in thanks and speaks again*]

DISRAELI. Her Majesty is on her way. Before she arrives, I want to thank the men who have so splendidly stood at my side and made our enterprise successful. Perhaps even they do not know—perhaps none of us realises—the greatness of what has been accomplished by their effort. We cannot see beyond the immediate moment; but unborn generations will understand. A new Crusade may some day issue from the East. to lift oppression from the West; some day, from the farthest limits of the world, the millions who call England Mother may hurry through this Ditch dug in sand, to their mother's help. The key nearly slipped through our fingers; but, thank God, when England is in direct need the men arise to save her. God grant it may ever be so. It is so now. First, there is Mr. Hugh Meyers—

SEVERAL VOICES [*Calling*] Mr. Meyers! Mr. Meyers!

[MEYERS *comes forward modestly from behind*]

DISRAELI [*Taking his hand*]—Concerning whose services I cannot speak too highly—Next, there is Sir Michael Probert. At a moment of grave crisis he came to my aid, against his—may I call them—prejudices.

[*Protest from* SIR MICHAEL]

Mr. Meyers—Sir Michael Probert, it is my privilege to inform you, that in recognition of your patriotic action, your sovereign has bestowed a peerage on each of you.

[*Applause, buzz of conversation*]

DISRAELI. Lastly: [*All are once more attentive*] You will be glad to know that my young friend,

who carried through the difficult and delicate negotiations with such consummate tact—I refer to Charles, Viscount Deeford—has just arrived in London. Deeford—

CHARLES [*Quietly*] Here, sir.

[DISRAELI *grasps his hand*]

[*Murmurs of approval and admiration from the crowd*]

DISRAELI. Deeford—My warmest thanks. I hope to have something to tell you to-morrow.

[*Applause.* CHARLES *joins* CLARISSA]

DISRAELI *stands alone, lost in thought*]

[*The crowd breaks into talk*]

[SIR MICHAEL *and* HUGH MEYERS *are surrounded by congratulating friends*]

[MR. TEARLE *enters through the curtains on the left with a telegram in his hand. He thinks he is the bearer of tragic news, and stands helplessly, not daring to move forward*]

[*The* DUKE *gently attracts* DISRAELI'S *attention*]

[*Dead silence*]

[*Everybody watches with intense interest*]

CLARISSA [*To* CHARLES, *in a whisper*] Look—!

CHARLES [*Surprised*] A telegram. *Here?*

CLARISSA. It must be very urgent. I am frightened.

CHARLES. Why?

CLARISSA. Hugh! Lady Beaconsfield has been very ill.

CHARLES. So Dizzy told me. But you don't mean you fear— ?

CLARISSA. Watch! Watch!

[DISRAELI *has automatically taken the telegram, and stands rigid, not daring to open it.* TEARLE *goes out the way he came*]

[*There is a burst of merry music from the inner room*]

[*A shiver passes over* DISRAELI. *He mechanically tears open the envelope and lets it flutter to the ground*]

[*At this moment there is a movement in the group at the back*]

[LADY BEACONSFIELD *enters slowly through the folding doors, in Court dress with a diamond tiara. She smilingly motions the crowd to silence, and comes down towards* DISRAELI, *who has his back to her*]

[*She lays her hand on his arm*]

[*He shudders and turns towards her. He stares at her blankly, not trusting his senses*]

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Very tenderly*] Dizzy!

DISRAELI. Mary Ann! [*With a bewildered glance at the telegram*] I didn't know—

LADY BEACONSFIELD [*Smiling*] The doctor sent you a telegram, dear.

[*A startling roll of drums, and a military band crashes out "God Save the Queen"*]

[*The crowd exclaim "Ah!—The Queen!" and line up*]

[*The curtains in the arch on the left are thrown open. A row of* FOOTMEN *is seen drawn up outside, and there is a great blaze of light*]

[DISRAELI *draws himself up; he takes* LADY BEACONSFIELD'S *hand; the* DUKE *leads the* DUCHESS; CHARLES *leads* CLARISSA; *the others pair off similarly, and as they move in a stately procession to meet the Empress of India*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

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